My Brothers and Sisters in Christ, let us pray. Lord God of our Eastertide Hearts, Minds, Spirits, and Souls, may the words of my mouth and the meditation of all of our hearts always be acceptable in your sight, our strength and our redeemer, Amen.

It had been a heck of a week. In the countryside, he was beloved. By the time he got to Jerusalem, they had plotted to kill him. Think of what they witnessed in the days leading up to Easter: There was that emotional Thursday evening, when Jesus washed the disciples’ feet, and shared a last supper with them. There was his agony in the garden, when those same disciples fell asleep as Jesus prayed. There was the betrayal by Judas, and Jesus’ arrest. The denial by Peter, crowds shouting for Jesus to be crucified. His trial, his torture, and then, finally, his crucifixion. His burial in the tomb.

And now, two days later, stories from Mary Magdalene who went to visit the tomb, that the tomb was empty, and Jesus was raised from the dead. Just imagine the swirl of emotions those disciples must have been feeling when Jesus came and stood among them that evening! They felt joy, of course. But also sadness over what Jesus went through. And confusion over what his resurrection meant. And fear; we know that they were very afraid. And, I strongly suspect, they felt guilt, too, over deserting Jesus, in his hour of need. And in response to all of that joy and sadness and confusion and fear and guilt, Jesus first words are these: “Peace be with you.”

What Jesus did on that first Easter was to show those frightened disciples the same grace and mercy and forgiveness and love that he has always showed. He came and stood among them and simply said, “Peace be with you.” And then, to ease their doubts, he showed them his hands and his side. No wonder the disciples rejoiced! Not only was Jesus alive and among them, he had also forgiven them for all that they had done – and…not done – over these last dramatic days.

We often read today’s gospel reading and focus on Thomas, the doubting disciple who needed to put his finger in the marks of the nails before he would believe. But this story is also about the other fear-filled disciples, trembling behind the locked door, and wondering what it all means. This story is really about each and every one of us: trying to live a life worthy of our God, all that he was, is, and has taught. But still…even now…struggling with doubt, weighed down with fear, worrying that we won’t measure up to expectations.

 “Peace be with you,” This gospel reading is really about the peace which surpasses all understanding; the peace which the world cannot give; the peace that can only come from Jesus’ blessed assurace; and the peace that comes when we most need it, simple words of grace, and mercy, and forgiveness.

Think back to a time in your life when you cannot feel God’s presence. And now, imagine Jesus showing up at that very moment, and saying to you: “Peace be with you.” God doesn’t always come when WE want him, but he alllllways shows up on time. That, too, is what the miracle of Easter means for us.

But today’s gospel reading is also about the ways in which we are called to share that peace and that joy, with a world so filled with doubt and fear. Jesus did not join his disciples in the upper room simply to celebrate his resurrection with them. He also joined them there to give them the gift of the Holy Spirit, and to send them into the world. “As the Father has sent me,” Jesus said to them and to us, “so I send you.”

But Jesus doesn’t just tell us to do this. He helps us to do this. That, too, is the miracle of the resurrection. After he said to those first apostles, “As the Father has sent me, so I send you,” Jesus breathed on those apostles, and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit.“ When Jesus breathed on them, I can almost imagine those disciples thinking back to the creation story in Genesis: when God took dust from the ground, formed Adam from the dust, and then breathed into his nostrils the breath of life.

As the Father did at the beginning, so the Son did to those first disciples. And so the Spirit does to us in our baptisms: When we are made new creations in Christ, we are no longer merely dust which will return to dust when we die. We are now brothers and sisters in Christ, who will live forever in Christ’s presence and promise.

In our faith, we are given the new life of the risen Christ right away, we don’t wait. This new life doesn’t begin in heaven. It begins here on earth, through the gift of the Holy Spirit, given to us in our infant baptisms. You see, it is not enough for Jesus that he conquered death through the great triumph of Easter. Now he wants to breathe this new life into us; he wants to share that new life with us. And then? Then he wants us to go out and share that new life with others. To share that new life with a world that is suffocated by anxiety and fear. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” God wants to breathe new life into this world through us. “

Into a world in the grip of death, Jesus asks us to take our resurrection selves and breathe unto worn and weary world new life. And our world needs that new life, doesn’t it? And if we wonder where it will come from, it will come from us. We are the ones continuing Jesus’ mission. We are now the body of Christ in the world. We are God’s plan to bring new life into a dying world, until the day that God’s son returns again. Our words, our deeds, our hope, our faith, our love, our witness in our daily lives, our acts of love to others; all of this done in Jesus’ name with the help of the Holy Spirit; all this is how the world catches a glimpse of the God who is not dead and will not give up on us. That is what it means to be an apostle, and that is what we are.

I’ll leave you with these final thoughts.

So that’s what those first apostles did, right? They ran out and shared their joy with the world, right? Well, not exactly, not right away. A week after this story takes place, the first Sunday after Easter, we find those disciples back in the upper room; the door locked again. Has anything changed? Jesus shows up again, and this time he’s upset, right? This time, he’s going to give them a pep-talk, and tell them to get out there and do what he asked, right?

Actually, no. The first thing he says when he shows up this time is – surprise, surprise – “Peace be with you.” Then, he turns to Thomas. Now, Thomas wasn’t there a week ago, when Jesus first appeared to the other disciples. We are not sure why, but I’ve always wondered if Thomas was the only one brave enough to leave that upper room to go and get some take-out because they all got hungry. So, what does Jesus do when he appears to Thomas? Again, Jesus shows patience and forgiveness and mercy. He said to Thomas, “Put your fingers here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.”

What patience Jesus has – not only with Thomas, but with all the disciples. What patience he has with you and me. The next time God isn’t here and near in your life, expect the unexpected.

It depends, I guess, on your expectations. Peace be with you. Thanks be to God, Amen.