



ST STEPHEN'S ANGLICAN CHURCH

11856 MAYS CHAPEL RD., TIMONIUM, MD 21093

Sunday after Easter
April 8, 2018

**✠ In The Name of The Father and of The Son
and of The Holy Ghost. Amen ✠**

The passage selected for the Sermon this morning comes from the Gospel:

The same day, at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews, came Jesus, and stood in the midst, and said, "Peace be unto you."

I was looking back at earlier sermons for this Sunday, and found myself with a serious case of déjà vu. I preached this Sunday four years ago, just as I was recovering from my leg injury. As was the case then, as I got closer to being back on my feet, I had to park myself in a part of the altar that keeps me near the celebration of the Mass, and yet out of altar party's way.

From that position, my closest companions in the service were the Easter flowers. Four years ago, there was a batch of tulips that had my attention. Until the consecration at the 9:15 service, the tulips were beautifully and closely cupped. I left my potted friends to join the altar for the Consecration and the Communion. When I returned to my spot, and what I saw was that in those minutes of consecration, the tulips had burst and were ecstatically laid wide open, petals turned to the roof.

Over the last week, I have thought a lot about those flowers and the timing of their blossomed climax. Of course, because I am a story teller, I thought about the journey of those tulips. It was likely a sad journey for the most part. These flowers were created to herald Spring by welcoming the warming sun through the last

remnants of winter's snow. But these few pots of bulbs blossomed in a green house. They never saw pure sunlight, or felt their tendrils softening the frosted earth. From green house, to warehouse, to a truck that jounced them about, to our parish hall. They were pushed and tugged and plopped when they were made to be moved only by the Spring winds. Finally, as they neared the climax of their short lives, they made it to the high ceiling room by our Altar. Of all the tulips of this Spring, these few pots of pink had had the hardest life, until the moment they were fulfilled.

Though they missed the sun, they awoke to be in the presence of the consecration and the glow of the Easter arrival of God's only Son upon his altar. Instead of frosted frozen ground, they blossomed in the softened hearts of this congregation as we repented our sinful ways. In the place of Spring breezes, they were buffeted with the organ and the sung praises of the redeemed and joyful Easter people, the petals opening to the strains of Alleluia and Hosanna! These tulips might have had the saddest journey, but their great redemption was to be ornaments of Easter, Heralds of the Risen Christ. They had the most beautiful and beautifully timed validation of their purpose and creation.

Maybe my imagination runs away with me, but I thought a lot about those tulips as I read the Easter lessons and prepared for this sermon. This Sunday is called Low Sunday, sometimes a reference to attendance the week after Easter, but really a recognition that in the quiet that follows the Resurrection, in the time of introspection that follows the hosannas, that many of the

sad circumstances of our lives have not yet changed. We see our Lord transformed, we hear the promise that we will join Him in glory, but the ground of our lives is still winter bruised with financial and health and family issues.

I thought first about the tulips when reading about Joseph and his brothers in Egypt. He springs the big surprise, the great announcement that the brother they thought they had enslaved or murdered now stood before them in power and glory. Put yourself in their place. Hurray, our brother is alive and powerful, followed by, oh no, we are at his mercy. How do we stand before him with the guilt of our taunting and scheming and violence and betrayal laid bare to the world? They were like those tulips early in the day, opened just a little, but huddled close together. Holding themselves tightly, waiting for the pronouncement of their sentence. Joseph understood their fears, and their shame, and he offered them... peace. Be not afraid, though you meant me harm, God used these trials I have endured to bring me to the place where I will be the instrument of your salvation. Our family will be delivered from the famine, gathered together, and will live in prosperity and glory.

I think the disciples looked upon the apparition of Jesus in their hiding place with the same trepidation and shame that plagued Joseph's brothers. We get to see the Resurrection with perfect hindsight of History. Of course the disciples would be fulfilled and gloriously happy to see their leader, friend, brother raised from the awful tomb. But in real time, at the moment that he materialized before them, we can imagine how they really felt. Thank God, but Oh No! Jesus whom we positioned for our political benefit until he was exposed and taken as a sacrifice, is here. The man we betrayed, and who we abandoned in the garden, is here. The man who told us He would rise in three days, but was disappointed by our disbelief and despair. The brother that proclaimed His Kingdom from the Cross with His last breath, is here to see us cowering in fear and worried only about saving our skins. The Apostles see Jesus appear before them, offering his wounds for their inspection, and we know their awe and joy were mixed with fear and especially with shame.

If we had been in the place of Jesus at that moment, the very last thing I can imagine that we would have said, was "Peace". Don't be afraid. Don't be ashamed. This family that has been torn apart by tribulation and violence is being restored. Your wounds are being healed by my wounds. Be not afraid of death, in my death I have given you life. Your trials in this world are

not over, but they are not in vain. I see them, I know them, I bless them, I will heal them, I will glorify your sacrifices as the marks on my body have become the emblems of my glory. "Peace." Have the peace that passes all understanding.

Which leads us to consider how the peace offered by the Resurrection is to affect our own lives. My grandmother's name was Esther, and she was named because she was born on Easter. Naturally, at this season, I think of her, and her namesake, Esther the Queen of the Jews in exile. Terrible trials threatened Esther and her family. Powerful men hated them and persecuted them. The order that every Jew should be murdered had been issued, and was only waiting the right moment to be fulfilled. Esther might be able to help, but to do so, she had to address the King without permission. In doing so, she would be inviting her own death. Though her own identity was safe, and she might escape the fate of her family and her people by hiding herself, her uncle commanded her to stand up and speak out, to reveal herself, and to risk the King's wrath and a sentence of death. Of course she was fearful and anguished. Why would her family and her God expose her this way?

Esther's father told her, be at peace, have courage. God will deliver His people in His time no matter what you do, but you have been chosen at this minute to be the instrument of His love and good will, to be His tool of protection and redemption. He will save his people no matter what you do, but think about the consequence of shrinking away in fear and despair when you have been chosen to be His angel.

In the quiet aftermath of a glorious Easter, when our doubts and problems reassert themselves in our lives, we can remember Esther, who risked her life, faced her doubts and became the means of salvation for her people. God is saying to us, Peace. Have the peace that passes your understanding, the peace that comes from faith. Your troubles may be great, but I am greater still, and I have chosen you to be the blessing to the people that you love. Come to the altar, and I will fill your life with my life. What was impossible for you to bear alone, will be transformed by the grace of my love within you. Peace.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen