I had a much different sermon in mind before I looked at the actual readings. And while I realize that clergy often don’t let things like the Bible get in the way of their point, the English major in me always feels that paying attention to what is actually written down is kind of important. But before we get to the sermon that I wrote for today, I am sure you are dying to know what it was that I was going to preach on, so let me explain. The Sunday after Easter and the Sunday after Christmas are generally known as low Sundays. The term low is used because attendance is low (pretty clever I know). My original thought was to contrast the lack of enthusiasm we see from those in our current world with the enthusiasm that the disciples display. But then, like I said, I read the text and there was not a whole lot of enthusiasm amongst the disciples. In fact, the disciples seem to be doing what most people who aren’t at church today are doing, just kind of hanging out at home. The Gospel opens with this thrilling passage, “When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews.” Its Sunday and they are hiding out. And so, the question becomes for them as it does for us: What are we supposed to do after Easter? For both the Disciples and for us it seems difficult figuring out what to do next. Now, Jesus seems to anticipate the disciple’s struggle, showing up when they are hiding out at the house and giving them the Holy Spirit, which is nice of him. But still why did Jesus need to show up to redirect them? What is it that gives us all so much trouble in trying to figure out what activity we should be engaged in the week after the Resurrection. Well, let’s take a little journey and see if we can figure something out.

If we look at the Gospels, we often see places where the disciples have very definite opinions about what, when and how to do certain things. They think children should be kept away from Jesus, and so they actively work to keep them away. They think that people outside of their group should not be doing miracles telling Jesus, “Teacher, we saw a man casting out demons in your name, and we forbade him, because he was not following us.” They have very strong feelings about which of them is going to be the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven literally having discussed which of them “is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.” They have views on how much food is required to feed the crowds, and they seem to always have opinions on fishing. And, if we are being honest, these are the kinds of things that we often have very strong opinions about – how worship services should be run, our own piety, potlucks, non-Episcopalians and so on. But why, with so many opinions at the ready is what to do after the Resurrection so elusive? Why don’t we bring the same passion to this Sunday as we bring to much smaller and less impactful issues. It seems to be something akin to what Wallace Stanley Sayre observed about academia stating, "Academic politics is the most vicious and bitter form of politics, because the stakes are so low." In life it seems that our passion is often inversely proportional to the importance of things. If you don’t believe me compare the energy and effort people will devote to getting to a Packers game with the energy and effort people will put into attending church. One concerns people moving a ball up and down a field whereas the other concerns the eternal disposition of our soul. So why the enthusiasm gap? Why do the seemingly small and unimportant things garner so much of our time and energy? Here is my answer or theory or whatever you want to call it. And I am not guaranteeing its perfect, but hopefully it is a start.

Some of you may be aware of a concept called family systems theory. I am by no means an expert on the subject, but I know enough to pretend. What family systems theory basically posits is that there are patterns of interaction between family members that perpetuate and maintain problematic and nonproblematic behavior. Healthy family patterns encourage healthy behaviors and unhealthy family patterns encourage unhealthy behaviors. And since I want to make things as depressing as possible let’s focus on unhealthy families. What tends to happen in an unhealthy family is that patterns of behavior actively work to keep unhealthy and damaging behaviors. For example, if a child, when they were younger, had a temper, the family builds up patterns of interaction to deal with this reality. However, as the child grows up and they learn to deal with their temper, an unhealthy family does not adapt to this new reality. They will instead try to make things go back to the way they were. This means that they may pester and cajole the adult child to try and get them angry, because they only have systems in place to deal with that person when they are angry. It’s kind of weird, but we have probably all experienced something like this, a pattern of behavior that does not meet a current reality. So why does it happen? Well, it happens because the pattern has become comforting or at least familiar. We understand how it works and so do everything in our power to make people fit within our understanding of them. And so now to my point. I think on the Sunday after Easter, it is much easier and comfortable to go back to the way things were before Easter. To live as if nothing has really changed. It’s not living our best life, but it’s living our most familiar life. And I would say the reason we stay with the familiar is because we are afraid of the unknown. We are afraid of what happens in the new reality of Christ being raised from the dead. In Mark’s Gospel Jesus asks, “Why are you afraid? Have you no faith?”

What an interesting contrast. Faith is the opposite of fear. When we live lives of fear we stay where we are no matter how mediocre or unhealthy it may be. Faith on the other hand is about following God into those places where we don’t know what might come next. I think it can be easy to wrap up the Easter season and sort of pack it away. Put it into the closet and wait to bring it out again next year, but that’s not what is supposed to happen. Easter changed to course of human history and therefore should change the course of our lives. When we truly live for God, we probably will not know what things are going to look like in a few months or years and that is okay.

Pete Townsend once said, “Don’t pretend that you know me, cause I don’t even know myself.” Just like the Disciples who were in fear of the Jews after the Resurrection, our fears come when we think we know what is best for us. The Disciples hid away and we stay away from post-Resurrection church and a post-Resurrection reality because that is what we know and are familiar with. And when we are afraid to step out in faith we are pushing back not just against God, but against ourselves and who we are called to be. We can convince ourselves that things which are not good for us are actually good for us. This new reality of Christ’s resurrection can appear frightening if we lack faith because there is always some fear in stepping into the unknown. But that unknown is where Christ is calling us. He is calling us to move into a new reality. This is a low Sunday, but it shouldn’t be. It is the first Sunday of the new life that God created for us in the Resurrection so that we may be his own this day and forevermore.