**2 Easter, April 27, 2014, Acts 2:14,22-32; Ps 16; 1 Peter 1:3-9; John 20:19-31;Rev Mary Trainor**

When my children were little, one of our favorite books was Mercer Mayer's book "**There's a Nightmare in my closet.**" It was about a kid who was scared to go to bed because in the bedroom closet there was a nighmarish monster who came out when the lights went out. The story ends well, with sleep because the monster happily goes to bed itself after having been comforted. And there was no more fear of the dark. Little kids are not the only ones scared of the dark. We live in a culture that sees darkness, and the dark times in our lives, as scary, bad, and evil. We certainly do not see our times in the dark as good or enlightening.

The apostles were in the darkness at the beginning of our Gospel story today. They were there in the upper room; all the doors and windows were shut. There was no light inside, and there were no lights to turn on. The apostles were in the darkness physically, and also in the darkness in their emotional and spiritual lives. Their leader, mentor, friend, teacher, healer, prophet, Jesus the Messiah, had just been killed after terrible suffering. The past three days had been the most horrific days of their lives. And then, they had been told He was mysteriously back, but they did not trust it, they could not believe it! In addition to all of this, Jesus' death had caused the civil authorities to be on guard, and they were looking to hunt down His followers. So, there they were, huddled together - in the upper room, vacillating between being confused and being scared.

Dark, uncertain, scary times are things we all can relate to as well. We have all had them. We've all had sleepless nights worrying, we've all experienced disturbing phone calls with bad news, we've all been in scary situations. Oh we remember these times in our lives, but we sure don't want to repeat them; we don't see any good in them. We don't like the dark times. We see the happy times as times we are blessed, as the good times. Yet today, as we ponder this scene that the apostles are in, we can obtain an insight about the darkness. Episcopal priest, professor, and author Barbara Brown Taylor was on the cover of Time Magazine this past week. She was not on the cover for some humanitarian thing she had done or some church news related to Easter. No, she was on the cover because of her writing about God in the darkness of our lives. In her book, Learning to Walk in the Dark, Taylor wrote, "**We pay a high price to shut out the darkness...our spiritual avoidance of the dark may be dangerous**." Yet, "**the resurrection happened in a dark cave....God and darkness have been friends for a long time....new life starts in the dark, whether it is a seed in the ground, a baby in the womb or Jesus in the tomb. It starts in the dark."** Which brings us to our question for today: Are we capable of sensing God on our dark days? Can we trust that God meets us, just as we are, in the midst of our times of darkness?

In today's Gospel, this dark day for the apostles ended up being a day of great blessing, great enlightenment, and great insight and love. They were huddled scared, Thomas was not with them, and poof Jesus appeared to them. Through the locked door the risen Christ was there, in the flesh. Later, when Thomas learned of this, he could not believe it; he was entrenched in that dark place. He was a guy who required evidence before he could believe something to be true. The joy that the other 11 apostles shared was just not real for him. We can relate to this kind of skepticism. And so the next week came, and this time Thomas was there in the upper room with the rest. They were still scared and confused when Jesus appeared to them again...poof! Now, Jesus already knew of Thomas' skepticism and so He addressed it right off the bat. He stood in front of Thomas and said, "***Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side***." Wow. Jesus met Thomas, right where he was in the midst of his darkness. He did not chew him out for his questioning, rather Jesus accepted where Thomas was, and presented Himself before Him to address the concern. Jesus does that for us too. Yes, He meets us where we are, in our dark places, in the shadows. Ok, so what did Thomas do? We learn that the moment was so profound that Thomas immediately recognized that this was the risen Christ right in front of him -- and he answered awestruck, "***My Lord and my God***."

Virginia was a colleague of mine at work in New Mexico. In addition to being a professional, she was a wife and mother, and a Christian. I had known her for a few years when I noticed that she was losing weight, looked sad, and missing a lot of work. Then, she took a medical leave for a month because of depression. When she returned to work, now doing much better, I spent some time with her. She shared with me that in the depths of her time of depression, she spent time pondering both her pain and Jesus' pain. Her face then glowed with peace when she spoke of the comfort she began to experience in her place of pain because of Jesus' pain and sacrifice for us. Virginia met God in the dark shadows during her time of depression, and God with scars was very much there with her. Isaiah (53:5) says, "***by His wounds we are healed."*** In the darkness of her life Virginia met Jesus, and she was led to a place of healing. It is important to understand that God does not cause our dark times. God does, however, meet us in our dark times. Our God with scars, Jesus, is present for you in your dark times too, just as He was there for Thomas, for the disciples, for Virginia.

How do we look for God in our dark times, how do we make room for Him in the midst of our anxieties and confusion and fear and pain? We do it as Thomas did: we are honest with Him, we say what we need to say and then we wait and see. Thomas expressed his emotions, his concerns, his needs. Then, he was there waiting for Jesus...expectant, open to it. For us we are to pray: expectant, open.

Our Psalm for today is a prayer for our times of darkness: "***Protect me, O God...I take refuge in you...I will bless the Lord who gives me counsel; my heart teaches me, night after night....show me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy***." Night after night, the Psalm said. Yes, we can discover God's presence and blessings in the darkness of our lives.

This morning, you said "**The Lord is risen indeed.** **Alleluia**." Living into the resurrected Jesus, the living God with scars, is an all the time thing: in good days and bad days, in the light and the dark. Will you allow Jesus to meet you in the darkness as well as the light? Amen. Alleluia.