Sermon – Second Sunday of Easter, John 20:19-31, April 19, 2020
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May God’s gift of peace be with you. 
May you have peace in your mind, 
in your house, in your isolation, 
in your decisions, 
with your family, in your relationships, 
in your singleness, in your uniqueness, 
Peace be with you. 
Amen.

When I was a child, my family lived across the street from a park. There are a lot of memories that I have of that park, but one stands out in particular. It’s not the other kids and me playing or running around. It’s not the green grass, or the tall trees, or a slide, or any particular park bench. No, what stands out for me the most, and what always will, is a scent, a smell, an aroma. And this aroma, this smell, is inextricably wrapped up with all of my other memories from that time. Just one whiff, and my whole childhood, in an instant, comes flooding back.

Indeed, to this day, if I come anywhere near the smell of barbecue--in someone’s backyard or someone grilling in a park--it will, in an instant, send me back to that youthful bedroom in our [house/apartment]. It’ll send me back to the heat of the sun coming in through the summer window cracked open just a little bit. It’ll send me back to the sounds and sights of fellowship and fraternity, family reunions and summer revelry, church gatherings and young love… Just one whiff and all of these scenes are right in front of me again. I can taste them as if they were happening right this moment.

Have you ever had this experience? For some of us, it is a word or a phrase, a saying from our past. As soon as someone says it, we are transported back to a favorite classroom, perhaps in front of a favorite teacher and sitting in our assigned seat for the semester.

Maybe, for you, it’s a song. You hear just a few notes and you remember a friend you haven’t thought about in decades. And you smile.

Or perhaps it’s a smell. A perfume. Someone walks by wearing a familiar brand, and you swear that grandma, though long gone, is standing right next to you, ready to give you a hug.

In today’s Gospel reading, we encounter a group of exhausted disciples. Although Mary Magdalene shared with them the good news that “Christ is risen,” the disciples remain in hiding, fearful that their connection to Jesus might result in their own deaths.
Suddenly, Jesus emerges from the shadows of their quarantine quarters, pushing his way through the fear and anxiety that fills the room, and offering them a greeting.

“Peace be with you,” Jesus says.

And, in case it didn’t register, Jesus says it again. “Peace be with you.”

And at that moment, for each disciple who was gathered there, it all came flooding back. There they were, feeding the 5,000. There they were at the raising of Lazarus. There they were, listening to the sermon on the mount, watching Jesus turn water into wine and turn over tables in the temple.

“Peace be with you,” Jesus said, and they were filled with the memories and the moments--and with all that Jesus had said and done among them. And they felt at ease again. They felt happy. And they smiled.

And yet, Jesus did not fill them with memories alone. Each memory they recalled would now become fuel for something even more important: the mission that was set before them--Jesus’ mission which they would now carry on, called to be his body in the world when he was gone. And so Jesus left them not only with memories and peace, but with a mission, and not only with a mission, but with the Holy Spirit, the one who would fill them with power, and love, and grace for the work that was yet to come.

_Siblings in Christ,
Peace be with you.
May you be filled with memories of all that God has done.
Peace be with you.
May you continue the mission and ministry with which Christ has entrusted you.
Peace be with you.
May the Spirit give us all power, love, and grace for all that lies ahead.
Christ is risen. He is risen, indeed! Alleluia!_