*“They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate in their presence (Luke 24:41-42).”*

It was about 1:30 AM on June 13, 2014, the first Friday of our first Bonnaroo Festival. My daughter and I had already enjoyed an unforgettable day and night of music from bands across the nation: Birmingham’s St. Paul and the Broken Bones at noon, Dr. Dog from Philadelphia at 2:00 PM, and the 20-year old British singer/songwriter Jake Bugg at 4:00 PM. After a quick chicken wrap, we saw Seattle’s The Head and the Heart at 6:00 PM, New York City’s Vampire Weekend at 8:00 PM, and finally, at 10:30 PM, the evening’s main act: Kanye West from…well, God only knows. Afterwards, tired, happy, and starving, we passed the Food Truck Oasis and Hamageddon: the RV-sized, porcine-shaped outdoor broiler that constantly exhaled an aroma of wood-smoke and bacon. Instead, we satisfied our craving for piping-hot hand-made Amish doughnuts and hot chocolate. As we ate, we could not help but hear (and feel in our rib-cages) the booming bass of some Electronic Dance Music at a stage four hundred yards away. The artist, a DJ, was Skrillex; I can’t say that I had followed him before, but we were hypnotically drawn to his technicolor spectacle of lasers and fog machines encircled by thousands of neon-clad, dancing youngsters. Each composition began with some combination of four-beat kicks and high-hat percussion (the distinctive “boom-chick” dance rhythm) onto which the DJ built layer upon layers of melodies, backbeats, and samples from synthesizers, all propelled by a strong bass line. Over time, the DJ faded the bass, raised the pitch of the percussion and melodies, and cranked up the volume until the atmosphere sizzled with tension and energetic anticipation. At just the right moment the music stopped for a moment, and then the DJ restored (or “dropped”) the thundering bass with earthshaking power, leading the song and the crowed into a different emotional dimension. We felt the music’s tension rise and release and we felt the crowd’s response with deafening cheers and an explosion of dance. Electronic Dance Music and its “drop the bass” technique may not be for everyone, but its power cannot be denied.

Kiralee Musgrove, a music neuroscientist in Australia, launched *The Music and Craving Study* in 2016. In it she hypothesizes that some enjoy Electronic Dance Music—which, as I’ve just described—builds in tension and then “drops the bass”—because that experience is processed in the brain’s region that deals with craving and reward: with anticipation and resolution.[[1]](#footnote-1) As the tension in a song’s pitch and rhythm increases, the brain increasingly and anxiously craves its resolution. Because all Electronic Dance Music features some kind of bass drop, the listener can be certain that, no matter how much tension a song may contain, the reward he anticipates will come. According to Musgrove, this predictability builds a safe framework for the brain to increasingly enjoy the increasing distance between a reward that one craves but has not yet received. Conversely, if music makes the listener anxious or tense and he is not certain that the bass will drop, the experience is simply unpleasant. Trust is the key to the listener’s pleasure: he has to trust that, sooner or later, the bass will drop and the tension will be resolved. If true, this study has important implications for life beyond music. If, like electronic music fans who anticipate the bass drop, we are certain that a thing that we desire will come to pass, the time we spend while waiting for that thing feels like joyful anticipation. Even if our waiting time is beset with increasing tension and difficulty, our increasing desire and trust that those tensions and difficulties will be resolved increases our joy. Contrariwise, those of us who do not believe that their desires will come to pass find that the passage of time and the increase of tension, anxiety, and frustrated desire only becomes agony, like a Skrillex song whose bass never drops.

In today’s Gospel reading, on Easter evening Jesus’ Apostles are gathered in a room but also in an emotional atmosphere of extreme tension. There was skepticism and mistrust among them: that morning, the women who followed Jesus came to His tomb, found it empty, heard two angels tell them that Jesus had risen, ran to tell the disciples what they had seen and heard, only to be scoffed at and rejected. There was division among them: of the Eleven, only Peter went to the Tomb to see for himself. He saw the linens lying there and he left—not believing, mystified, and alone. Finally, there was confusion: later that day, two other followers of Jesus met Him on the road to Emmaus, which was about seven miles outside of Jerusalem, but did not know it was Jesus until He sat down to dinner with them and, after breaking the bread, disappeared. They immediately ran to tell the Apostles what they had seen and heard. During their conversation—at the end of a long day of skepticism, separation, and confusion during which everyone seemed to be running in circles all around Jerusalem—Jesus Himself appears and pronounces, “Shalom,” which means “Peace be with you.” Already tense, the disciples’ emotional distress spikes—they think that they see a ghost. Even though Jesus tries to reason with them that He could not be a ghost and still have the wounds in His Body, it is too much for them to handle. And so, sensing that their tension and anxiety are at their maximum, Jesus drops the bass. He asks, “Do you have anything to eat?” It may not seem like much of a bass drop to us, but it means everything in the world to them. When they give Him some broiled fish in a honey sauce, and when He reclines among them at their table and eats with them, the tension in the room breaks and they are finally capable of hearing what Jesus wanted to tell them: He, in general, and His Resurrection in particular, are themselves the bass drop climax of thousands of years of layers upon layers of God’s laws and prophets that anticipated and built a craving for Him, for His gifts to the world of repentance and forgiveness, and for the gift of the Holy Spirit Whom the Father would give to those who love, believe, and follow Him.

More importantly, when Jesus eats at table with them and explains how He is the fulfillment of millennia’s anticipation, He introduces to them a new tension. They will have to wait for this new tension to be resolved, but because He promises that He will resolve it, their waiting is not agony but a joyful anticipation. This new tension is the promise of their resurrection. The Body that He revealed that Easter night two thousand years ago was a forerunner of what would happen to their bodies on the day of their resurrection, and ours, too. As His Body was on Easter, so shall our bodies be when He raises us from the dead, reunites us with all whom we have loved, and brings us into the newly remade world in which His will shall be finally done as it is in Heaven. Grace does not destroy the nature it created; God’s grace perfects it. Even though our self-centeredness ruins our life and the lives of others, everything that God created is good, and He still sees it that way and still loves us. The life that awaits us after we die and are raised again is not to be stripped of our bodies but to enjoy our bodies’ transformation into a more glorious kind of physicality that radiates with the glow of their Creator and Redeemer. The power of the Resurrection is not found in our escape from the world or from our bodies: it is revealed in their restoration to their original goodness and their transformation by God into a glory that far exceeds their first creation. When we anticipate our resurrection, everything that we do now—with and through our bodies—is colored and changed by that anticipation. When we anticipate our resurrection, we regain our ability to believe in, give thanks for, find beauty in, and care for everything and everyone on this side of eternity. When we anticipate our resurrection, we find deeper meaning in the life we know now and we begin to see the joy that awaits us.

An Episcopal priest I knew in California once told me about a dinner with an old school-friend who had successfully dedicated everything in his entire life to become, by the age of 60, a captain of industry with more wealth than what we knew to do with. He made it: they dined that night on his yacht. As the evening stretched into night, in a moment of candor that takes place among some men only after dinner and drinks, the captain of industry told the priest, “Once in a while I’ll be surprised by a good meal, or an interesting bottle of wine, or a memorable evening with my wife; otherwise, for me, life is a series of diminishing returns.”

Without hope, without trust in God, without any craving for anything good that lasts, life is at best a series of diminishing returns. But Christ is risen from the dead, and we will be raised like Him. While life is sometimes (or often!) stressed, compressed, and crackling with tension, Christ’s Easter bass drop elevates us into unending series of ascending anticipations of love, those anticipations’ joyful resolution, and then greater anticipations of even higher and even deeper love that will continue to expand forever. With excitement, we yearn for our future experience of “Love Divine, all loves excelling.” With certainty, we expect to see how we shall be changed from glory into glory. With joy, we crave to feel how His love keeps lifting us higher and higher.

1. *Specifically, the nucleus acumens which, with the olfactory tubercle, comprise the ventral striatum.* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)