

The Third Sunday of Easter, April 18, 2021 – Good Shepherd, Beaver Dam

Luke 24:36-49 -- ³⁶As they were talking about these things, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." ³⁷But they were terrified and frightened and thought they were looking at a ghost. ³⁸He said to them, "Why are you troubled? Why do doubts arise in your hearts? ³⁹Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself. Touch me and see, because a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." ⁴⁰When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. ⁴¹While they still did not believe it (because of their joy), and while they were still wondering, he said to them, "Do you have anything here to eat?" ⁴²They gave him a piece of broiled fish and some honeycomb.^[a] ⁴³He took it and ate in front of them. ⁴⁴He said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms." ⁴⁵Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures. ⁴⁶He said to them, "This is what is written and so it must be:^[b] The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, ⁴⁷and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. ⁴⁸You are witnesses of these things. ⁴⁹Look, I am sending you what my Father promised. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high."

Smoked oysters in a tin with the tab broken off, a pistachio shell with its slit sealed shut, a coconut, and the human mind. What do they all have in common? They are tough to open. In today's Gospel account, Luke reports that Jesus appeared to his followers on Easter evening. Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. Luke was a physician, but his reference to an open mind had nothing to do with brain surgery and everything to do with getting a grip on the kind of love that wraps us in joy as we live in a world gone mad and eventually whisks us to heaven. That's why we step into that room with those disciples and join them to pray,

Living Lord, Open My Mind

- To your work
- Through your Word
- For your world

Among all the earth-shaking events of Good Friday, the burial of Jesus seems like such a minor detail. The Bible says, "Joseph took the body, wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and placed it in his own new tomb" (Matthew 27:59-60). "The women who had come with Jesus from Galilee followed Joseph and saw the tomb and how his body was laid in it" (Luke 23:55). Jesus' burial was a fact. It happened, witnesses and everything. But it's not a minor detail. It is important because it means that Jesus really did die. They didn't bury people who are in a coma. If he were only unconscious, Joseph of Arimathea and the women who assisted would have told his disciples. But Jesus did die, and his disciples knew it. That explains why they were so disillusioned and disheartened, hiding in a room in Jerusalem, and that explains why they really didn't expect to see him again. Sure, he had predicted his resurrection. "But," the disciples reasoned, "since we know that he is the Son of God, maybe his talk of resurrection means that he was going back to the Father, giving up his flesh, blood, and bones. He raised others from the dead, but coming back to life himself? Probably not." No wonder they were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost when he appeared in that room.

But this was no ghost. He said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have" ... And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, "Do you have anything here to eat?" They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate it in

their presence. If this were a ghost, a figment of their imagination, or a hallucination, then we'd have to assume along with the disciples that Jesus was still dead. Then we'd have to wonder, "Is he still paying the wages of sin?" But this was the real living Lord Jesus, the same Jesus who had taught them, the same Jesus who had hung on the cross, the same Jesus who had died, the same Jesus who had been buried, the real, living Jesus, whole and complete. A real, complete death and a real, complete resurrection mean the work Jesus came to do, to bring sinners back into harmony with God, was real and complete.

You want a greater sense of purpose in life and positive outlook on life, don't you? It all starts with your relationship with God. You want a sense of well-being and security in your spiritual life, don't you? Then God has to give it because if he doesn't, you and I would be hiding in fear like the disciples, waiting for the sky to fall, or for temptations to ensnare us, or for the devil to attack, or for God himself to strike us with lightning because of our sins. But the heavenly Father sent his Son into the world with one big task. He did not take on human flesh to find out what vacations are like. He did not take on a human body to find out what it's like to get a job, make money, and retire. No! He came to storm into Satan's camp, rout the devil, burst the chains of sin that bound us to the devil, and settle us into God's camp where we can live in peace and joy. More than anything else, I might want Jesus to solve my problems. You might be consumed with wanting Jesus to make your boss more appreciative. I might want him to turn back the clock and give me another chance to be more selfless. You might want him to snap his fingers and fix a friendship. But when those wants become a priority, then our minds are closed to what counts the most. Living Lord, open our minds to your work so that we revel in your victory over sin and Satan and live in your love!

Students learn very quickly when doing a research paper, "Check the sources. You may have learned a lot and are ready to write your paper, but don't just copy from Wikipedia. If possible, find the author and interview him or her personally. Get the original manuscript. Go to firsthand sources for authentic truth."

The disciples had proof enough of the reality of God's love. They saw and touched the Lord Jesus himself. But more than that, they had the support of all Scripture. Jesus said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms." Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, "This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day." Added certainty! Added confidence!

The most vicious heresy that has hit Christianity in the last two hundred years is that the words of Scripture are not all true. But that is a close-minded lie. All of Scripture is God-breathed. Don't just take my word for it. Explore on your own. Compare, research, study, go to the firsthand sources, the eyewitnesses accounts. We do not have seventy-five generations of hand-me-down stories that have been edited, supplemented, or changed. We have first-hand, original source material. Listen to the apostle John: That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life (1 John 1:1). Game shows and Twenty-Questions may be fun, but I don't want to get into a guessing game when it comes to a connection with God. I don't want to wonder whether God loves me. I don't want to say, "Well, I hope I'll be in heaven." I want to know for sure. I want certainty. Don't you? That's why we pray, "Living Lord, open our minds through your Word!"

It's tough to teach little children to be open-minded enough to share. If you don't believe me, try putting two toddlers in a room next to each other and give them one toy. Built into every one of us is the in-born desire to keep our stuff for ourselves. For kids it may be toys, "That's mine! Don't touch it! Give it back!" For adults it's money, "I have to take care of all my bills and savings first, and God can have leftovers if there are any." But that's being close-minded.

Originally, God intended the Israelites to announce his love to all. That's why he put them at the crossroads of the ancient world with trade routes, highways, and shipping lanes. But as time went by, they became used to not sharing. It was their fault in falling away from God. He allowed enemies to attack to wake them up, but they simply walled themselves in. I suppose I would become defensive, too, and build big, thick walls to hide behind and keep others out if that happened to me. So, it's not surprising that the disciples were close-minded about mission work.

Slowly but surely Jesus opened the minds of his disciples to the concept that God's love is something he wants to give to all. He intentionally traveled through the territory of the hated Samaritans and introduced a Samaritan woman at a well to the water of life. When the pressure of crowds and enemies picked up steam, he took a break and took his disciples north of the border of Israel where he engaged a Phoenician woman in conversation and healed her daughter. Later on, he healed a sick servant of a Roman commander. About six months before he headed to Jerusalem to die, he traveled east across the Jordan River into territory dominated by ten Greek city-states. His sermons and parables indicated that as the Israelites rejected his message, it would be proclaimed among the Gentiles. Now on Easter evening he commissioned the disciples, "Repentance and the forgiveness of sins will be preached in my name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. I am going to send you what my Father has promised: but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high." He opened their minds, "Don't keep this a secret! When the Holy Spirit has empowered you, share the good news with the world!"

In former years we thought about foreign mission work as sending missionaries in our name to exotic locations across the oceans – to go where we couldn't go. But the world has changed. The world has come to America. We have opportunities to share the message of Jesus with people from all over the world right here in the U.S., in Wisconsin, yes even in Beaver Dam. But that may take some adjustment on our part. Our personal comfort zones may make it hard to share with people who look different, eat different, dress different, and speak a different language. Our prayer this morning, "Living Lord, Open my Mind", includes the idea of expanding our comfort zones so that through our own words and friendship others will learn about our living Savior. The past two Wednesdays for our chapel services at St. Paul's Lutheran School in Ixonia, we had the privilege of speaking with WELS Missionaries. One lives in Paraguay and the other in Ecuador. When I asked them what how we can pray for them and their work, both talked about prayers for their families and co-workers and blessing on their current method of outreach, which is primarily through social media and the internet. But Missionary Schulte said something that brought a little smile to my face. He asked that we pray that the **Lord open the minds** of those who come in contact with him through the internet. His request quickly reminded me about this sermon which I would be preaching at Good Shepherd that evening. Jesus' words to his disciples encourage us to pray, **Living Lord, open my mind to your work, through your Word, for your world.**

If we worshiped a God who was not real, who was character in a story, or who died, and all we had were lifeless statues, none of this would matter. We could close our minds like a coconut and our hearts like a tin of smoked oysters, and when we die, just disappear into dust and ashes. But we have a Lord who has come back from the dead, lives with us now, and wants us to live with him forever. That's why we rejoice that he answers our prayer, "Living Lord, open our minds!" Amen.

Pastor Joel Jaeger
April 18, 2021