

Sermon Easter 3 2018

April 15, 2018

Luke 24:36-49

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. This morning we meditate on the Gospel Lesson previously read, especially these words: **“Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures.”**

Understanding the Scriptures. How are you with understanding the Scriptures? As Luke uses this word “open,” that implies something being closed, doesn’t it? Do you sometimes feel like the Bible is a closed book? It’s easy to feel that way. There’s a lot that’s confusing. In fact, what Luke is saying there is quite informative, isn’t it?

In fact, I asked if sometimes you feel like the Bible is a closed book, but look at what this says. What was closed? Were the Scriptures closed? Did Luke say, “then He opened up the Scriptures to their minds?” No. What did He say? **“Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures.”** Their minds were what were closed. Now as I say that, it could be easy to think that we should have a conversation all about having an open mind, since that is one of the mottos for our day. You don’t like the way culture is going? Just have an open mind about it. You don’t like the degradation of the family? Just have an open mind. You don’t like that churches are in decline? Just have an open mind. But that’s not the point, is it?

No. Look closely at the words—which is something we should always be doing with the Scriptures. Look at what the words say. What do these words say? **“Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures.”** So what’s the opening of the mind for? Is it for being open to new ideas and experiences? Not specifically, no. It’s to understanding the Scriptures. It’s to hearing what God is saying in His Word. Will that sometimes be new? Will those ideas sometimes be unfamiliar? You bet, look at the people around us who have no concept of what Christianity really is. Look at people who have never set foot in a church. You think that they’re finding new experiences? Without a doubt. But what’s the point? Is it new experiences? No. It’s to understand what God is saying to us.

Now, then looking at the words even more closely, what do we see? Did Jesus tell the disciples “be opened to understanding the Word?” Again, no. What does it say? HE opened their minds. He did the work. He spoke His Word to them and that Word gave them understanding. From what we know in the whole of Scripture, we can in fact say that He sent the Spirit to them through that Word and the Spirit worked to open their minds, as the Catechism says, “I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to Him, the Holy Spirit has called me by the

Gospel, *enlightened* me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith.” It’s the Holy Spirit who is coming, who is opening their minds, who is enlightening them.

What we see is that sin prevents this. Sin closes off our understanding. The problem isn’t with the words in the Bible, the words on the page, the problem is with us. When I don’t understand something in Scripture it’s because of my sinfulness. When you don’t understand something in the Bible it’s because of your sinfulness. And what we need is the Holy Spirit to overcome that within us.

What we need is akin to what Jesus did when He healed Bartimaeus, the blind man, whom He healed and opened His eyes. Our spiritual sense is blind. It can’t see truth when it walks right into it. We can try to feel our way toward it, but we’ll still get it wrong. I don’t know if you’re familiar with the parable of the Elephant, but there’s something true about it. Do you know that one? It’s the parable that says that when it comes to knowing God we are like a bunch of blind men coming up to an elephant. One feels the trunk and says, “This is a snake.” Another feels the side and says, “No, this is a wall.” Yet another feels a leg and says, “No, this is a tree.” Finally, one feels the tail and says, “No, this is a rope.” Of course the parable is saying that no one can really know God. What our words from Scripture this morning say is that’s true, so God has spoken. As someone I know put it with the parable, “Then the elephant spoke and said, ‘I am an elephant.’” God has spoken in the Scriptures and said who He is. And the Holy Spirit is needed to open our minds to that. This means this is miraculous.

However, it also means that if someone says they are open to the Scriptures, but will not accept what they say, they aren’t really trusting them. They are resisting the Holy Spirit, finally rejecting Him in their sin. Being truly open, open by the work of the Spirit, says, “I don’t understand this but it’s true.” Faith says, “Even when I don’t like it, it’s true.” I’ve pointed out before Second Peter One where Peter speaks about His experience in the Transfiguration, His experience seeing Jesus transformed into light, revealing His divinity, and yet he tells us there that we have the word made more certain: the Scriptures. So that’s what the opening of the mind to the Scriptures says: this word is more certain than what I experience. I could witness Jesus on the mountain top in all His glory, and His Word is more certain.

Now as I say all of this, we need to look at something extremely important for how Luke says that Jesus opened their minds. Look at what He says. I mentioned before that this opening was the work of the Holy Spirit, and that this was through Jesus’ Word. In other words, we should understand that it wasn’t just like Jesus stood there and pointed His Holy Spirit laser at them so that they would understand. No look at what Luke tells us: **“Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and**

**said to them, ‘Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.’”**

Do you hear it there? How did He open their minds? By saying what the Scriptures are about. What’s that? For example if I asked you what the Bible is about what would you say? I’ve heard people say a number of things. For example how to live. How to be good so we can go to heaven. I’ve heard people say that it means B.I.B.L.E: Basic Instructions Before Leaving Earth. Is that it? Well it’s true that there are examples of how to live. It’s true that the Law tells us that whoever would keep the Law would live. But what’s the problem? We don’t keep it. The Bible isn’t just about telling us instructions. No. Jesus is making the point that for our minds to be opened we have to understand that it’s about Him. **“It is written that the Christ should suffer.”** It’s about Jesus. And He points this out in three parts.

First, we heard Him say this just before the disciples’ minds were opened. He said, “I told it to you.” I told you **“everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.”** So this is about His fulfillment of the Scriptures. Think about that. Think about when this is happening. What are the Scriptures for the disciples? Do they have the New Testament? No. When Jesus opens their minds, He’s showing them how to understand the Old Testament. He’s showing them that the Old Testament is about Him. Do we hear Jesus of Nazareth by name in there? No. But we hear of Yeshua—Joshua—who leads the people to the Promised Land. We hear of the Son begotten by the Father, of the Holy One who will not see decay. Jesus’ blood is spattered all over the pages of the Old Testament, the very ink of their words. As I often say: the Old Testament is the context for the New and the New Testament is the fulfillment of the Old. So, that’s the first way Jesus opens their minds. He shows them that this about Him, that He is fulfilling the Scriptures.

Then there’s more: that this is all about His dying and rising again. When you see the blood shed in the Old Testament, this is all pointing to the blood of the Lamb of God, the One who takes away the sin of the world. So their eyes were opened to see not merely fulfillment, but **“that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead.”**

Finally, we see that the Scriptures are about **“Repentance and forgiveness of sins”** proclaimed in His name. In Lutheran terms, we call this Law and Gospel. What it tells you as a Christian is that as you read the Scripture, you should read those instructions, those commands, that are in the Bible, and you should hear them and repent. And when I say repent, what do I mean? Our Lutheran Confessions, the

writings that I as a pastor vow to teach consistently with because of their correctness in understanding the Scriptures say, *“Contrition is the genuine terror of a conscience that feels God’s wrath against sin and is sorry that it has sinned. This contrition takes place when the Word of God denounces sin.”* In other words, when you hear that the Scriptures are telling you about repentance, that means you need to repent. You need to know that your sin is wrong and rightly deserves the full wrath and anger of God. You need to understand that Jesus isn’t just a marshmallowy teddy bear who just wants to hug you. He is the true God in the flesh who is coming to mete out judgment to each according to what he or she has done. You should hear that and fear and confess your sin. But you should also hear the Gospel: that this One coming in judgment judges those who trust in Him in mercy, the mercy that He won for them on the cross. That as He was hanged on the cross, He was hanged for your sins. You should hear how He doles out this forgiveness to you in His gracious gifts: His Word, in baptism, in giving you His very own body and blood. Christians, this is what this Word says.

When Jesus **“opened their minds to understand the Scriptures,”** this is what that meant. It meant that it was necessary for Him to open their minds through His Spirit, and that these Scriptures are truly about Him. They are the way that God reveals Himself to us that we would know who He is, not making guesses, not feeling blindly on an elephant, but listening to the elephant’s voice as He tells us about Himself. As we think of it this way, then, Christians, read those Scriptures. Even when they feel like a closed book, don’t let them literally be closed because they’re sitting on your shelf. These are the words where Jesus tells you about Himself.

As I say that then, I leave you with four things to consider as you read. Four things to help you meditate on those Scriptures—and as I give you these, you should know these are from Luther, I’m not so wise as to come up with them. He said, hear the word and think of each thing in it as (one) instruction, (two) thanksgiving, (three) confession, (four) prayer. In other words as you read each portion ask: “What am I taught about God?”; “For what should I give Him thanks?”; “What sins are uncovered in this text that I should confess?”; “What does this text teach me to pray for?” As you do that then, and as you read that Word, I pray that your minds would be opened all the more to understand the Scriptures as well. Amen.