

Weekend of Sunday, April 15, 2018
3rd Sunday of Easter/Lectionary X/Proper X/Year B

Primary Text: Acts 3:12-19

Luke 24:36b-48

Sermon Title: “Open Your Mind to Understand”

Theme

In this account of an appearance after his resurrection, Jesus opens the minds of the disciples to understand him as Messiah. Jesus convinces them that he has been raised and sends them on a mission to proclaim the message of repentance and forgiveness.

Text

First Reading: Acts 3:12-19

¹²[Peter] addressed the people, “You Israelites, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we had made him walk?¹³The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our ancestors has glorified his servant Jesus, whom you handed over and rejected in the presence of Pilate, though he had decided to release him. ¹⁴But you rejected the Holy and Righteous One and asked to have a murderer given to you, ¹⁵and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses. ¹⁶And by faith in his name, his name itself has made this man strong, whom you see and know; and the faith that is through Jesus has given him this perfect health in the presence of all of you.

¹⁷“And now, friends, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers. ¹⁸In this way God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, that his Messiah would suffer. ¹⁹Repent therefore, and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out.”

Gospel: Luke 24:36b-48

^{36b}Jesus himself stood among [the disciples] and said to them, “Peace be with you.” ³⁷They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost. ³⁸He said to them, “Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? ³⁹Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.” ⁴⁰And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. ⁴¹While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, “Have you anything here to eat?” ⁴²They gave him a piece of broiled fish, ⁴³and he took it and ate in their presence.

⁴⁴Then he said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled.” ⁴⁵Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, ⁴⁶and he said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, ⁴⁷and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. ⁴⁸You are witnesses of these things.”

Sermon

I find it interesting that the lectionary calls for both this gospel text from Luke, which occurs on the evening of the resurrection, and the reading from Acts which is also written by Luke, but which occurs more than fifty days after the resurrection. And the reason I find it so interesting is that in the earlier story from Luke, Jesus is illustrating his new incarnation to the disciples by displaying his wounded hands and feet and eating with them and then saying to them, “Ta Dah! Look, it is *really* me, the crucified and risen one. I *really* was dead, but now I *really* am alive. Let me explain to you all that has happened and why it had to be that way.”

And the reason he has this conversation is because as Jesus says, “You are witnesses of the things.” In other words, Jesus himself knows that this new reality is beyond comprehension. Dead people just do not come back to life. He knows that *disbelief* is the path of least resistance and these disciples are the ones who saw it happen. He will need them for the Christian movement to take root in the world. And it is difficult for us to get our heads around it too. We believe the story in faith, but we weren’t there 2000 years ago.

Jesus needs them to understand or at the very least, acknowledge what they have seen. Because by his very presence among them, he, Jesus, has proven he has the power over life and death. And that brings new meaning to everything he has ever said or done. Mind blowing! I know!

Those huddled in the little upper room, cowering for their own lives, were in fear of those outside their cloistered walls. Now, Jesus, the one they had abandoned and betrayed and saw crucified till dead with their own eyes – was there in the room with them, and he didn’t even bother to knock!

Well in that way that Jesus had, he knows they are feeling all kinds of emotions; jubilation and fear; confusion and yet, there he is, their Lord. What next? they must have been thinking to themselves.

And so Jesus shows them his hands and feet – he even invites them to touch him. “Ghosts don’t have flesh and bones as you see I have.”

Jesus still discerns that the disciples are still not picking up what he's putting down – and who can blame them – no one before or since has been in this position.

And so then Jesus asks for something to eat. Now, I don't really think Jesus is hungry. He asks for something to eat for their benefit, and for our benefit, as yet another demonstration that he is 1) really alive, and 2) whatever he is may be in question, but what he is not isn't – he is not a ghost. Because, as we all know, ghosts cannot eat. I mean, you've seen the movie, "The Pirates of the Caribbean" haven't you? The food and drink falls right through them!

Then why did Jesus ask for food? I am so glad you asked. Jesus needs his disciples to *get it*, to be sure about what they are seeing, and to believe it – for two reasons. The first is because he needs them to be witnesses. The last words he said to them in this passage are, "You are witnesses of these things."

I can just imagine that the minute they get the chance they will want to tell someone about him, I mean he is amazing isn't he? And yet, no one is going to believe them. "You are making that up, aren't you? Kidder! April Fools!" And that is when Jesus needs them to look the other in the eye and say, "I saw him with my own eyes. I saw the wounds in his hands and feet. I touched his flesh. I saw him take food. He is not a ghost. He is risen!"

But they aren't there yet. They still need time to process.

But I said, Jesus needs his disciples to *get it*, to be sure about what they are seeing, and to believe it – for two reasons. The second reason is that he needs them to understand why it had to be this way. Luke wrote it this way,

⁴⁵he opened their minds to understand the scriptures

Think about it, if his sacrificial crucifixion on the cross had no meaning, no purpose then ... his standing before them was a ... magic trick, a curiosity, a freak of nature.

But there is more to it than that. *But* who of us can understand the love, grace, and mercy of God? And so he "opened their minds to understand scripture." I wish we had a transcript of that conversation, don't you. I mean, over the course of my twenty plus year ordained ministry and four years of seminary I have owned and read hundreds of Christian books all of which try to explain theology and

christology and ecclesiology and other -ologies in their own ways, but to have a transcript of how Jesus explained how he has fulfilled everything written about him in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms, ... why that would be priceless.

Back to those in the upper room, they, having seen him with their own eyes and touched his flesh with their own hands, having heard him explain with their own ears, could at least begin to understand – with his help of course.

And aren't we glad, because 2000 year later we have the writings of the the apostles and patriarchs and church fathers and theologians and Bible scholars and pastors and teachers, all whom continue to try to make sense of it all, to open our minds to help us understand what scripture says, and how his passion was always going to be the way it had to be.

And what do they do with the knowledge of this new reality? Well, they obediently hang out in Jerusalem until the day of Pentecost and then they will be given the gift of the Holy Spirit. Then things really got interesting!

Remember Peter the bumbler? The one who always said the wrong thing at the wrong time? The man who once swore he would never deny his allegiance to Jesus and then just moments later did three times, now, just some fifty days later he stands out in the public, unafraid of the consequences and preaches the sermon of his life. Peter, takes advantage of the large and interested crowd to proclaim the gospel with great clarity and conviction and passion. What made the difference some might ask? An answer is found in verse 15; he allowed his mind to be opened by Jesus Christ and that combined with his own first-hand eye-witness experience of Jesus made the once stumbling Peter quite a convincing apostle and evangelist.

You see, before the resurrection, Peter was *just a man* who thought Jesus was also *just a man*. But after the experience he had with Jesus he was changed. Who are you going to fear when your leader, your lord, your master and friend, can't be defeated, even by death?

Peter was made a new man by his experience of Jesus.

And that *opening of the minds* of the disciples is not limited to those folks back then, but through the Holy Spirit, it is ours too. The only thing that we need to do is seek it, desire it, begin to use it and it is ours.

Do you want your mind to be opened to scriptures? Would you like to have greater understanding and purpose of Jesus' life, death and resurrection? Would you like to have greater understanding and purpose of your own life, after all it, your purpose comes from God revealed in Jesus Christ?

Let me tell you the right answer. YES!

Raisin' the Bar Challenge

We may not have been there with Jesus and Peter and the others 2000 years ago, but what this story teaches us is that *the story* is not over, and is in fact ongoing and now includes us. The Spirit has done marvelous things in my life, your life too, I am sure of it. It is the ongoing story of God revealed in Jesus Christ in human lives that we are witnesses to. Pray to God for greater understanding of scripture, of what God is doing with you and those around you so that you can be a faithful witness too.

We are witnesses to that, and if our life in all its details doesn't live out a message of gratitude to that good news then we don't deserve to call ourselves Christians, which by the way means, *little Christs*.

Prayer

Lord God, forgive us for our arrogance. We are still in the season of Easter and already we are back in our routines. A stranger in our midst might not even be able to tell that we are celebrating the greatest event in human history. Send your Spirit to continue your work of refreshing our spirits so that we might live our lives as faithful witnesses to what you have done out of love for all humankind. This we pray in thanksgiving to the crucified and risen one, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen