

3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Easter Year B, Open your minds...You are witnesses

This Gospel story is richly loaded with things to talk about but two things really caught my attention when I first read through it...First Jesus opened the minds of the disciples so that they could understand what they were seeing and hearing and then he said to them, "You are witnesses to these things."

He opened their minds and then told them they are witnesses.

Understanding and witnessing - these two things go hand in hand with each other and get to the heart of the very reason for our existence as the Body of Christ in the world. First we open our minds - we understand - and then we witness - we do something. Jesus never goes half-way...he never lets us off the hook - knowing him is just part of God's plan; doing something about it is a huge part of that plan too.

So, if we must first "open our minds" and then be witnesses, what is it that we are opening our minds to, what is it that we must first understand? And, just as importantly, how do we open our minds to understand? Well, luckily for us, this story today tells us.

Let's tackle the "what" first. What are we opening our minds to; what do we need to understand? Think for a moment about the mental state the disciples were in as they huddled in fear in that upper room. Their messiah had been brutally murdered...their hope was gone. And Peter...Peter hadn't seen Jesus since he'd so vehemently denied him - "I don't know him," he had insisted. "I am not one of his disciples," he had said. The disciples had fled the garden, had deserted Jesus when the authorities had shown up to arrest Jesus...we don't hear from Luke that they were even at the cross. Now here they are, frightened for their lives, full of shame for their denials and desertion, trying to

process the news that their messiah has risen from the dead when suddenly, he's there...Jesus enters into a locked room and is standing among them.

Jesus is there among them and has every right to tell them off, to chastise them for their desertion of him...But he doesn't...Jesus stands among them and says, "Peace be with you." Jesus doesn't chastise them, he brings them peace and comfort. He brings them his love. That's the first important thing to know about this story. The second thing is...Jesus is there.

Jesus stands among them and they think he must be a ghost. They are unable to recognize the holiness that stands before them. They are continuing to live, think, and understand in the usual human way - Jesus is dead, this must be a ghost. They have separated spirit from matter, divinity from humanity, heaven from earth. But when we make that separation we close our minds, we deny ourselves the resurrected life for which Christ died, and we lose our sense of holiness in the world, the ability to recognize holiness in the world, in one another, and in ourselves...

...Because Jesus came to earth - the Word made flesh - to erase all of those separations...to bring together spirit and matter, the divine and the human, and to bring together heaven and earth. In the person of Jesus, the Son of God came to earth - like us in everything except sin as Paul tells us. When that little baby Jesus was born, God came to earth, God's kingdom arrived. He didn't come to earth just to see what it would be like to live as a human, to astound us with how humble God could be. He came to save us. He came to glorify us. He came to make our lives worth living. He came to give us that sure and certain hope for

what awaits us when this age is over. He died because he loves us. He was raised to new life so that we could live with him.

A lot of people think that God is somewhere up there but certainly not here among us. God's kingdom is somewhere but not here. With Jesus' birth and with his resurrection, God shattered that human way of thinking of who God is, where God's is, and how God works in this world. Just to be sure we realize Jesus has erased the separation between human and divine, heaven and earth, Jesus - in his resurrection body, the body that even his disciples don't recognize - Jesus shows up and asks, "Have you got any fish - I need to eat." He couldn't spell it out for them...and us...any more plainly - his spiritual body and his human body are one and the same. Yes, his spiritual body arrived into a room with locked doors but also, yes, his human body can eat fish. That's a little mind-boggling. Resurrected life can never be understood, contained, or controlled by human thought or understanding. Jesus' resurrection needs us to step outside our usual human understandings of reality and enter into the divine reality.

It's no wonder that the disciples - and us - need some help with understanding these things. When Luke writes that Jesus opened their minds so that they could understand what he was teaching them, what Luke really means is that the Holy Spirit brought them understanding. That's the "how" part of things...how we open our minds.

The Holy Spirit is the gift of God. It is the person of God who dwells within us - we were given this gift at our baptism. The same Spirit who rested on Jesus at his baptism, rests on us. The same Spirit that binds together the Holy Trinity with the bonds of love, binds us to that

Trinity. That's amazing. The Holy Spirit is our teacher and guide in the physical absence of Jesus. The Holy Spirit shows us the truth of God's word and helps us to understand. This is not simply an intellectual understanding of the brain...most of the disciples, after all, were uneducated fishermen. It is an understanding of the heart through faith. We don't need to know how God can be three persons in one, we just need to know that He is. We don't need to know how Christ's presence is in the bread and wine, we just need to know that it is. We don't need to know how God resurrected Jesus, we know that He did.

Through Jesus, God gave the gift of the Holy Spirit to the disciples and to us so that we can know the unwavering love of God in Jesus Christ...So that we can know that, because of Jesus, God has erased the separation between spirit and matter, between divine and human, between heaven and earth...So that we can live this knowledge and bring this knowledge to the rest of the world, to be witnesses. To witness is to see - with the help of the Holy Spirit we see God at work in our lives, we see Christ in us, and we see Christ in others. We are witnesses based not on book-learning, but on who we are, how we live, and on our relationship with the risen Christ.

Carry this story with you over the next week. Let it open your eyes, your heart, and your mind to the life Christ is offering you. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, let it be the voice of Christ opening your mind to understand. Pray with it. Wrestle with it. Trust it. "You are witnesses of these things," Jesus says to us. Tell it. Live it. Become it. The resurrected life is yours. You are witnesses. You are witnesses.