

August 26, 2018 (Mission Sunday) – Luke 24:44-53 & Romans 10:11-17

*“Then he opened their minds.”* That's an interesting expression that Luke uses in our Gospel lesson today, isn't it? Jesus opened their minds. What does that mean?

We talk about being open-minded in our culture today. Of being tolerant and accepting of everyone and everything, no matter how sinful. That's how the world uses the term “open-minded.” But that's obviously not what Jesus is saying here.

Perhaps some of you thought of something miraculous. After all, that phrase is often used when Jesus heals someone. He opened the deaf man's ears. He opened the blind man's eyes. So is this pointing to a miraculous healing of the disciples' minds?

Well, maybe, in a way. There's definitely something powerful going on here. The Holy Spirit is at work here. But it's not in a way that we normally identify as miraculous.

Because when those other men were healed, it was an instantaneous thing. One second they couldn't see or hear. The next, they could. It was an immediate supernatural intervention.

But here, we see a process at work. And a goal that isn't simple healing of the body. It's understanding. He opened their minds to understand the scriptures. He opened their minds to understand Him in the scriptures. His presence throughout God's Word.

I think we might take this for granted. We take for granted that Christians have always had a New Testament. That Christians have always had the four gospels. We take for granted that we can open our Bibles and see the life and teaching of Jesus described to us.

But when Jesus opens their minds to understand the scriptures, he's not talking about understanding Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Obviously, they weren't written yet. He's not talking about understanding Paul's Epistles. Paul was still a Pharisee at this point.

No, when Jesus opens their minds to understand the scriptures, he's talking about the Old Testament. About the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms. And, as he said a few verses above, about how they are all about Him. They're all about Jesus.

Jesus is in the books of Moses. He's in the promise of a Savior to Adam and Eve. He's in the killing of the Passover lamb to save them from the angel of death. He's in the manna that fed the Israelites in the wilderness. Jesus is in the Law of Moses.

Jesus is in the prophets. He's in Ezekiel's prophecy of the one who will take away our heart of stone and give us a heart of flesh. He's in Jeremiah's prophecy of the righteous branch of David who will rescue God's people. He's in Isaiah's many prophecies of the suffering servant who will die for their sins. In fact, Martin Luther once said that Isaiah spends so much time talking about Jesus, it could be called the fifth gospel. Jesus is in the Prophets.

And Jesus is in the Psalms and the Writings. As the righteous king just like David, who leads his people in prayer and praise. As the man of wisdom just like Solomon, who teaches us God's Word. As the man of faithfulness just like Daniel, who goes down into the pit of death and yet walks out alive.

Jesus is all over the Old Testament. The disciples just needed to see it. They just needed to hear someone preach that good news to them.

And they just needed to have all these stories and prophecies and songs of the Old Testament connected to the events they had just witnessed. We wouldn't have a New Testament if those apostles and evangelists hadn't looked at the Old Testament and seen it being fulfilled before their very eyes.

It was all as plain as day in front of them. They just needed to have their minds opened. They just needed to hear God's Word. They just needed to have someone show them the love of Jesus and His power to save them in everything they read.

And that was the mission that Jesus sent them on. His mission had been to come to earth, fulfill everything that had been written about him, and then open the minds of his disciples so that they could see and understand that fulfillment for themselves.

So now their mission is to be witnesses of that. They had seen the Christ come to earth. They had seen him suffer and on the third day rise from the dead. They had seen him proclaim a Gospel of repentance and forgiveness of sins to all nations, Jews and Gentiles. So now they are to be witnesses of all they have seen.

And they were. We wouldn't be here if they hadn't been those faithful witnesses. How would we have ever called on him if we have not believed? How would we have ever believed if we had never heard? How would we have ever heard if someone hadn't preached to us? And how would they have ever preached to us if Jesus hadn't sent them to us?

You see, you and I are the product of 2000 years of people sent to be witnesses. You and I are the product of 2000 years of people preaching the good news. You and I are the product of 2000 years of people believing and calling on Jesus' name.

You and I are a link in a vast unbroken chain of faithful witnesses to Christ. People who heard the Word of God and had their minds opened to see Jesus in every word of Scripture. And people who wanted nothing more than to share that Word, share that good news of repentance and forgiveness of sins, with their friends and their neighbors and their children. People who were fulfilling the mission that Christ gave to his Church. That Christ gave to us.

Because that's our mission too. It's our only mission. We, as a congregation, do not exist for any other reason. St Paul writes in Philippians that if it were up to him, he'd just die and go to heaven, but God has kept him around because the Philippians need him. So he'll keep working.

If it were up to us, we would probably just want to die and go to heaven, but God has kept us around because Boonville needs us. Your friends and neighbors need you. Your children and grandchildren need you. So we keep working.

That's our only mission in this life. This church building is a wonderful blessing from God. But it exists for that mission. The money our congregation has in its bank accounts is a wonderful blessing from God. But it exists for that mission. And everything that you each have individually – your money and your home and your possessions – it is all a wonderful blessing from God. But it exists for that mission too.

It's easy to forget that. It's easy to be distracted by luxury and worldly priorities. It's easy to be selfish and stubborn. It's easy to say, "I worked for it, therefore it's mine."

But you know, there's really only one person who has the right to make that last statement. "I worked for it, therefore it's mine." Because when Jesus went to the cross he worked harder than any person ever has. He endured pain and suffering like you and I have never known. He worked and he worked and he worked.

And because of that work, he redeemed us. He bought us back from sin, death, and the devil. He made us his own. He and he alone has the right to say, "I worked for you, therefore you are mine. Everything you are, everything you have, everything you do, is mine."

And yet, he doesn't take ownership of us and make us slaves. He takes ownership of us and makes us sons. He claims us as his own and then he frees us from the burden of the Law. He redeems our life from the pit, and then he crowns us with love and compassion.

He gives us such great blessings that when the disciples hear him give them this mission to be witnesses of the resurrection, they don't respond with groaning and grumbling. They don't moan about how much they're going to have to give up for Jesus. They don't whine about how Jesus has made their life so much harder.

Quite the opposite. They returned to Jerusalem with great joy and were continually in the temple blessing God for all that Jesus had done for them. That's the response of someone who has had their mind opened to understand the scriptures. And someone who wants nothing more than to open more minds to understand what they have come to know.

That's the mission of the church. You and I are each children of God by baptism and faith in God's Word. There is nothing that can change that. Nothing that can take that away. But there is always more to understand about God's Word. There is always more to understand about the fulfillment of God's promises through Jesus Christ. There is always more to understand about how we each carry out the mission of the church.

So spend some time in God's Word. Let it open your mind. Let it be a witness to the resurrection for you. And maybe you too will know that same joy the disciples felt as they proclaimed the death and resurrection of Christ to all the world. Amen.