

“Opening Minds”

Sermon on Sunday, April 18, 2021

Dear church,

I don't know which kind of Bible you have at home. Maybe it's an old Family Bible or it's one you just recently bought. Do you actually know which translation your Bible uses? It makes a difference! Perhaps it's the New International Version (NIV) or “The Message,” a contemporary translation filled with American idioms. The NRSV, the Jerusalem Bible or the King James Bible are other possibilities. It's also possible you don't use a Bible anymore. When you read Scripture it's from a Kindle or an online portal where you can choose the translation you prefer. We have so many different choices! And all of them talk about the same God and the same story of Jesus the Christ.

Wait, there is one more thing all these Bibles have in common: no matter which translation you have, they are all difficult to understand, without exception. Let's be honest, some books in the Bible are downright confusing, especially when you get into the thick of the prophets and their sometimes weird revelations; or when you get lost in the long-winded genealogies of the Old Testament; or when you try to understand the convoluted sentences of Saint Paul. No wonder people shy away from reading this book. It's not light bed time reading. What we need is an interpreter, a guide, because even translated into the most accessible English, this book is still set in a foreign culture, using examples which are a few THOUSAND years old. How are we supposed to relate to that?

It's a familiar problem, surprisingly it was familiar even to the disciples of the first hour! Listen to this: the gospel of John suggests that the risen Christ acted as an interpreter of Scripture to the disciples. Twice in the Easter narratives Jesus meets with his followers and opens Scripture to them. In fact, John says, he opened their minds. He helped them interpret their own situation and experience in the light of Scripture. So, in essence what we all need is an interpreter!

Of course, some of you will say now: “That's what we pay our pastor to do, to interpret scripture for us, to open our minds, to help us understand Scripture...” and you know what, I accept that responsibility. But there is more to opening people's minds. It's never a one-way street, school teachers know that. First of all, a teacher always benefits from the questions and

perspectives of their students. I learn things all the time in our weekly Bible Studies through the questions and comments of our participants. Secondly, you can open people's minds only if they let you, if they are willing and curious and malleable enough. And third, sometimes we have to be like little children and throw away what we think we know in order to hear with virgin ears what God wants to say to us. Our brains are clogged with our own opinions. So, by far the most difficult task is to open a closed mind, to inspire someone who has already made up their mind with a different perspective. I would even say it's impossible. When Jesus famously said to Nicodemus, "you must be born again," that's what he meant: your mind needs a total changeover!

So, let us give credit not only to the risen Lord in these Easter narratives but also to his followers for allowing Jesus to open their minds. That's no little thing, you see! We could even go as far as saying: it's the key to Christian life: allowing Jesus to open our minds. And make no mistake, our minds are sometimes bolted shut with the nails from our preferred ideology, with the way we have always looked at things. The lenses we use to see and interpret life they don't let us see what Jesus wants to show us. It's like telling a blind man about the colors of spring.

If you think I'm too pessimistic, ask yourself this question: when was the last time something or someone made you change your mind about something significant? Or when was the last time you pondered an insight or a perspective you don't usually agree with? If you are like me, it doesn't happen very often. But it's what happened to the disciples in the days after Easter. They radically rethink what actually took place on the cross. They gain a new perspective. They realize that the death of Jesus was pre-ordained and part of the Messiah's game plan. And yes, it helped a little bit that they were approached by a walking miracle, the Risen Christ.

I know of a church in our community that's called, "The church of the Open Door." Nice name. How about "The church of the Open Mind?" It would be an even more appropriate name for what church needs to be in order to follow Jesus. I'm not suggesting we change our name to that. It would be pretentious. But approaching every single day with an open mind and a curiosity about God is something I would like to prescribe to all of us as we walk on our roads, the risen Christ never far away and eager to fill our minds with an abundance of thoughts that bring life and resurrection. And each time our mind is bent toward him, it's a miracle. Happy Easter season! **Amen.**