

“He Opened Their Minds to Understand the Scriptures”

Luke 24:44-53

Christ is risen!! He is risen indeed!! Alleluia!!

It is very clear, as we read all four of the Gospels, that, up until this point, the disciples were more than a little confused in regard to what they were supposed to be doing.

If you remember back to the time immediately before and after Easter, the disciples were a lot confused. Peter was telling Jesus that there is no way that Jesus can be handed over to the chief priests and be crucified – “May this never be, Lord.” And Jesus says, “Get behind Me Satan.” And when the soldiers come to the Garden of Gethsemane, the disciples scatter and hide, and Peter, three times, denies even knowing Him. They don’t even show up to help bury Him. Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea take care of that.

The morning of the resurrection, the disciples “refuse to believe” the words of the women who came from the empty tomb. Peter and John go into the empty tomb and still don’t know what to think. Thomas absolutely will not believe until he, not only can see it with his own eyes, but until he can put his finger into the marks of the nails and his hand into His side, “I will never believe,” he says.

After that, the disciples still don't know what to do next. A group of them (7 of them) go fishing. This is what they knew before Jesus called them to be "fishers of men." Jesus meets them on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, and He eats with them, and Jesus restores Peter – three times saying, "Do you love Me? Then feed my sheep."

For 40 days after Easter, we are told that Jesus offered "many proofs" of His resurrection and spoke to them about the Kingdom of God and everything that was written of Him in Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms. Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures. This is where everything begins to change. This is where everything leading up to the Christ suffering and on the third day rising from the dead begins to become clear.

And our Lord ascends into heaven, but first He tells His disciples to wait in Jerusalem because the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, is coming. And these fearful, hiding, denying, doubting disciples suddenly become bold preachers and "proclaim His name to all nations beginning from Jerusalem.

We confess in Luther's Small Catechism. "I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ my Lord, or come to Him. But the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith." Even the disciples who were privileged to live with and be taught by Christ needed the Word of God, the understanding of the Scriptures to be opened to them.

It is like what we read in the story of the Rich Man and Lazarus: the rich man wanted Lazarus to go back to earth and warn his five brothers of the torments of hell, but Abraham says, "They have Moses and the prophets . . . and if

they will not listen to Moses and the prophets, they will not listen even if someone should rise from the dead.”

And having Scriptures opened to them and receiving the Holy Spirit 10 days later on Pentecost, from there, the apostles go throughout Judea, and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (Thomas went all the way to India and was killed there because of his faith). The work of the Word of God and the Holy Spirit in them was evident after the Word of God was opened to them. Someone had risen from the dead. But it took the Lord opening the minds of the disciples to the Scriptures for them to believe.

God’s Word and Sacraments, the Means of Grace, by which the Holy Spirit does His work changes everything. The Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel; enlightened me with His gifts – we confess this in the catechism.

Christ’s flesh and His blood now come to you by means of bread and wine. This is the work of the Holy Spirit. He has “enlightened you with His gifts” which includes washing you with the Word of God joined with the water. And don’t forget about the Word of God which comes to you through your ears or your eyes. The Holy Spirit uses those means also – the spoken and written Word. Your pastor speaking the words of Absolution is the work of the Holy Spirit in you.

When the Holy Spirit comes with the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms and the Evangelists, He changes everything. Look to your own life. When the Holy Spirit comes to you and washes you and you are baptized in the name of God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit teaches you with the very Word of God which bears His name, and He feeds you with the flesh and blood of Jesus Christ which is, as Paul says in our Epistle reading, the name “above

every name that is named” – and every knee shall bow and every tongue confess in heaven and on earth and under the earth that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

He who is seated at the right hand in the heavenly places has changed everything. He has made all things new. And our ascended Lord continues to reveal Himself through Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms and the Evangelists and the Sacraments. As Luther says, “It is in Scripture and nowhere else that God permits Himself to be found.” The Word of God spoken, the Word of God proclaimed, the Word of God joined to water, bread, and wine brings us into the closest proximity to God that we will find on earth. It’s why we call these things “holy.”

Our Lord ascended into heaven 40 days after His resurrection from the dead. Through the presence of His Word and the sending of His Holy Spirit, His promise is sure: “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.” And the promise given to the disciples that day is sure also: “This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.” Until then, He comes to us in His Word. Amen.

Christ is Risen!! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

The peace of God which surpasses all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.