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JESUS OPENED THE TOMB AND NOW OPENS OUR MINDSSermon for the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Easter, 2018

Luke 24:36-49

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is the Gospel read before, Luke 24:36-49: <sup>36</sup> **While they were talking about what had happened, Jesus stood among them. He said to them, “Peace to you!”**

<sup>37</sup> **They were startled and terrified and thought that they were seeing a ghost.**

<sup>38</sup> **He asked them, “Why are you troubled? Why do doubts come into your minds?” <sup>39</sup> Look at My hands and My feet! It is I Myself. Feel Me and see! A ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see Me have.”**

<sup>40</sup> **After He said this, He showed them His hands and His feet.**

<sup>41</sup> **While they were still so overwhelmed with joy that they could not believe it, He asked them, “Do you have anything here to eat?”**

<sup>42</sup> **They gave Him a piece of broiled fish. <sup>43</sup> He took it and ate it while they watched Him.**

<sup>44</sup> **He told them, “These are the very words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, namely, that everything written about Me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.”**

<sup>45</sup> **Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures. <sup>46</sup> He told them, “This is what Scripture has said: ‘The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, <sup>47</sup> and, based on His name, repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.’ <sup>48</sup> You will testify to these things.**

<sup>49</sup> **“I am sending you what My Father has promised. Wait here in the city until you are armed with power from above!”**

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Today we continue our celebration of Easter and the wonderful news of Jesus’ resurrection. The Good News is that Jesus has defeated death, has opened the grave, and has risen to life again. That is certainly important and joyous news for us. Yet as important as that is, today we hear of another opening that Jesus has done that is just as

important as His opening the grave - and that is that Jesus “**opened**” the minds of His disciples “**to understand the Scriptures.**”

This vital action by Jesus echoes an earlier lesson from what Luke reports about the Emmaus disciples. Remember how those two disciples were on their way to a village called Emmaus? They had been talking about the events of the crucifixion when suddenly Jesus appeared, but they were kept from recognising Him. Only at their evening meal when they were together, after Jesus had taken the bread, said a blessing over it, then broke and began to give it to them, were their eyes opened and they recognised Him.<sup>1</sup>

The natural faculties of sinful humans are unable to perceive that Jesus is the Christ and that He has accomplished their salvation. Human eyes are blind to the reality of Jesus’ presence even when He stands directly in sight, and ears are deaf to His words even when He speaks them audibly, unless Jesus Himself heals the spiritual blindness and deafness. Eyes and minds must be opened, and faith created by God in order to understand the mystery of the message of His crucified and risen Son. Both salvation and its apprehension through faith are God’s work. While Jesus was still with His disciples, He had made predictions about His upcoming passion, but these words had confused them. We are told they did not understand what Jesus was saying,<sup>2</sup> but now, as He did with those Emmaus disciples, Jesus, who is now standing by the sea shore, reverses the incomprehension and confusion shown by the disciples. After showing them His hands and feet, and having something to eat,<sup>44</sup> **He told them, “These are the very words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, namely, that everything written about Me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.”**<sup>45</sup> **Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures.**

The disciples **were still so overwhelmed with joy that they could not believe** that Jesus was standing before them in the flesh, eating **a piece of broiled fish**. Only *after* Jesus opens their minds to understand the Old Testament are they able to fathom that the goal of Jesus’ journey to Jerusalem was to fulfil what had been written about Him concerning the cross and empty tomb. They needed their minds opened to the Word of God in order to believe and understand the Good News of the open tomb.

That kind of open-mindedness is very different from what our world today thinks when it values open-mindedness. To the world, this means to be open to all kinds of thinking, all opinions, and all views - that there is no one truth, but that we need to be open to all different interpretations and judgments. This echoes what Pilate said to

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 24:13-31

<sup>2</sup> Luke 9:44-45; 18:31-34

Jesus, “*What is truth?*” (John 18:38). To be open-minded is to open your mind and let all sorts of things fill it - all kinds of worldly wisdom, enlightened thinking, and newly discovered truths.

But the result of all this is that many minds today resemble a landfill or a cesspool, because all those nuggets of worldly wisdom have been dumped in to mingle and mix and ferment together, causing confusion and doubt. Not knowing what to believe, and not knowing the truth, can be very dangerous to everyone, but perhaps even more so to our younger generation. There are lots of things in the world today that vie for the attention of our young - things that compete against their spiritual life. Once that attention is attained, pretty soon their church life falls by the wayside and faith in Christ grows cold or is changed from faith alone in Christ to faith in Christ plus something else, or God forbid, their faith dies, which is the ultimate goal of the world and the devil. That is why it is so vitally important for parents to train up their young in the ways of the Lord, so that they won’t depart from it when they are older.<sup>3</sup> That is why it is so important for parents to take an active role in watching over their children, to see that they are grounded in the Word of God, so that they do not waver when the world challenges them about their faith and what they believe, that nothing stands in the way of their attaining eternal salvation by Christ alone through faith alone.

Coming back to our text, confusion had gripped the disciples after Jesus’ crucifixion and death, for when He appeared to them, “**They were startled and terrified and thought that they were seeing a ghost**.” Their reaction is similar to that of Zechariah and Mary at the presence of holiness.<sup>4</sup> Zechariah was troubled and full of fear when an angel of the Lord appeared to him, while Mary was greatly troubled at hearing the news from the angel Gabriel that she would become the Mother of God. Both of these were natural responses of sinful humans who are suddenly aware that they are in the presence of holiness. The disciples see Jesus and panic because they think He is a ghost. Furthermore, **doubts** arose in their **minds**. There is a great struggle going on in their hearts between the joy of believing and the dread of being deceived. Their hearts were stirred up. Think of muddy water or a pot of soup that gets stirred up. All the stuff that had filled their minds, that had settled to the bottom, got stirred up that horrible weekend and clouded their thinking, so that things weren’t so clear anymore. All kinds of thoughts and ideas and worldly wisdom had been stirred up in their heads, and they didn’t know what to think or believe anymore. Could someone live after he had died? Was Jesus who He said He was? Why didn’t God save Him? Could this be a

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<sup>3</sup> Proverbs 22:6

<sup>4</sup> Luke 1:12, 29

real body? But their terror and fear soon turn to joy - but only *after* Jesus invites them by saying, “<sup>39</sup> **Look at My hands and My feet! It is I Myself. Feel Me and see! A ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see Me have.**”

A transformation takes place within the Eleven and the other disciples. They journey from incomprehension and unbelief to joyful worship of the risen Christ. At the beginning of his Gospel, Luke describes the purpose of his writing in terms of catechesis. The Gospel is written for an individual named Theophilus who has been “catechised” and so is familiar with the basic tenets of faith. Luke writes to Theophilus saying, *so that you may be sure that the things about which you have been instructed are certain*, (1:4). The certainty of faith - which is the goal of any true catechesis, as announced by Luke to Theophilus, is now attained in Jesus’ appearances to His disciples after He rose from the dead. Faith comes from recognising that the One who stands in their midst and greets them with peace is the great I AM. “**It is I Myself,**” Jesus says. The two Emmaus disciples recognised Jesus through His catechesis on the road and in the breaking of the bread.<sup>5</sup> Now the risen Christ offers this same recognition to the rest of the disciples.<sup>6</sup>

Jesus comes to them and opens their minds - not to let more junk in! - but to clean out the junk and fill their minds with His Word. To clean out the cesspool of filth and falsehood and fear and all kinds of wrong thinking and ideas, and then fill their minds with His truth and wisdom. For only He can open the tombs of our minds and fill them with the light of His Word and truth, with repentance, faith, and forgiveness, that we may know Him and believe and be saved. Jesus opened the tomb and now opens our minds to open heaven for us.

This is what the risen Christ is still doing today, here, in His Church. From our Second Reading before, we hear John say, “<sup>1</sup> *See what great love the Father has given to us, that we are called “the children of God”! That is what we are,*” (1 John 3:1). Children of God! What a good picture that is of us and our relationship to our heavenly Father. “Children” makes no reference to chronological age but features instead the parent-child relationship. Young or old, it matters not. Being a child of God means being given a privileged relationship which one does not naturally deserve. Jesus is God’s child by nature and essence as the eternal Son; we become God’s “children” by grace through Spirit-wrought faith in Him. As children born through the water and the Word of Holy Baptism, we are born again to a new life as we are joined to the death and resurrection of Christ. Through water and the Spirit, the tombs of our minds are

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<sup>5</sup> Luke 24:31, 35

<sup>6</sup> Christ had also appeared to Peter, as noted in Luke 24:34.

opened and filled with the truth of the risen Christ. And this not just once, but over and over again as in repentance and faith we return to our Baptism, to clean out the junk this world pours in, to be absolved of our wrong and sinful thoughts and words and deeds and desires, and to be filled with the truth, love, and clarity of Christ's life and love.

Then something else happens. For after God first acts and we receive, we then act. For just as children learn how to speak by being spoken to, and learn how to act by imitating their parents, so, too, do we children of God.

After opening and cleaning out the minds of His disciples and filling them with His truth, Jesus calls them eyewitnesses who **will testify to these things**, namely that **'The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, <sup>47</sup> and, based on His name, repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.'** The disciples would be sent to speak what they have seen and what they believe. They will be sent with His Spirit, to speak as they have been spoken to, to love as they have been loved, to forgive as they have been forgiven, and thus to open minds filled with confusion and doubt, sin and death, that the light of Christ's cleansing forgiveness may shine on all. Their message would be the same as Peter spoke when he said, <sup>19</sup> *Repent, therefore, and turn to God, that your sins may be wiped away, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord,*" (Acts 3:19). *"Times of refreshing"* are times when sins are wiped out, and there is peace with God, when sinners are brought to faith in Jesus.

Yet this is really not their work at all, but the work of the Spirit given to them who will work through their word. Jesus told them, <sup>49</sup> **"I am sending you what My Father has promised."** The Holy Spirit would come upon them, equipping them for Jesus' mission.

Finally, it must be said that not all worldly wisdom is bad. The Lord has blessed many people in our world across time with great minds and intelligence, and through their work and the carrying out of their vocations, we have received many great things from God - great advances in medicine, technology, and communication, and so many other things, and we certainly thank the Lord for them all. But with the good has come the bad. The false wisdom, false gods, and false truths of the prince of this world often clouds hearts and minds to *"deceive us or mislead us into false belief, despair, and other great shame and vice"* (Luther's Small Catechism, Explanation to the Sixth Petition).

Dear friends, there is another wisdom with which our minds must be filled, a higher wisdom that rules all worldly wisdom, that we know what is true and what is false; what is good and what is not; what is godly and what must be left aside, and that is the

wisdom of Christ and His Word. He is here for you, to fill you with His gifts, to forgive your doubt and give you peace, to fill you with His life-giving body and blood, that having here received, you go and give with His life, His Spirit, His words, His truth, His love, and His forgiveness.

May the Spirit of Christ working now through you as you speak and meditate on His Word, continue open and fill your hearts and minds. Do not listen to the wisdom of the world, instead, listen to the One who has died and risen again. One day He will take us to heaven, where our faith will be turned to sight, as we see with our own eyes, the risen Christ. Amen.

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

### PRAYER FOR THE THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER

Almighty God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, You have sent Your Son into the world, not to be served, but to serve and to give His life to redeem all people. After He had offered His life as the one sacrifice for all sins for ever, You raised Him from the dead by Your glorious power. Give us a living faith in Him, so that we may possess the sure hope of eternal life through Him. We thank You for all Your kindness in our lives. Do not let us forget that every good gift comes from You.

We thank You for taking away the darkness of our minds and spirits, and for revealing to us Your Word of truth in Jesus Christ. Pour out Your Spirit on us, that He may keep us spiritually alive through Your Word in our hearts. Give us deeper understanding of Your truth, and of Your great love for us.

We thank You for the fellowship of believers that we have in Your church. Protect your church from enemies without, and keep us all in the unity that the Spirit gives. Prevent disunity, party spirit, and discord from giving Satan a foothold among us. Keep us all in Christ Jesus by faith and joyful obedience, and in loyalty to Your infallible Word. Shower Your blessings upon Your Church everywhere, and give it success in all Your work.

Give us opportunities to tell the Gospel to others who need to hear it, and give us the wisdom and the courage to use them. Enable us to draw people into Your Word, through which Your Spirit works faith, and fill us with the message of Jesus' resurrection and the ability to tell it forth.

We thank You for giving us Christian homes. Surround every family with the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, that love, peace, forgiveness, comfort, joy, and moral purity may fill our lives.

We thank You, Lord, for the blessings we enjoy in our rich land. Defend it, both within and without, from all who would harm it by sin, undermine it by strife and rebellion, or destroy it by war.

We thank You, O Father, for the gifts of our daily bread, for health and healing, education and social joys, friends and companions, and all the beauties and wonders of Your creation. Give us weather that is appropriate for our needs. Alongside all the blessings that you give us daily and richly, give us, as well, joyful and thankful hearts, and the willingness to use what You give us to serve You.

We commend to Your gracious care those among us who are ill, lonely, or depressed. Comfort them with the good news of their redemption and the hope of life eternal through Jesus' sacrificial death and glorious resurrection.

Surround us with Your love, and finally receive us into perfect, unbroken fellowship with You and our Saviour Jesus Christ. Hear the prayers we bring You in His precious name. Amen.

### THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER

Acts 3:11-21

<sup>11</sup> As the man clung to Peter and John, all the people came running together to them at the porch that is called "Solomon's," greatly amazed.

<sup>12</sup> When Peter saw the people, he responded to them, "Men of Israel, why are you wondering about this or why are you looking intently at us, as though we had made him walk by our own power or piety? <sup>13</sup> The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified His Servant Jesus, whom you handed over and denied before Pilate when he had decided to release Him. <sup>14</sup> You denied the Holy and Righteous One and asked for a murderer to be granted to you. <sup>15</sup> You killed the Author of life, but God raised Him from the dead. We are witnesses of this. <sup>16</sup> By faith in His

name, His name has made this man, whom you see and know, strong. The faith that comes through Him has given him this perfect health in front of all of you.

<sup>17</sup> "Yet now, fellow Jews, I know that you have acted in ignorance, as your rulers have also done. <sup>18</sup> However, in this way God has fulfilled what He had foretold by the mouths of all the prophets, that His Christ would suffer. <sup>19</sup> Repent, therefore, and turn to God, that your sins may be wiped away, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, <sup>20</sup> and that He may send the Christ, whom He has previously appointed for you, namely, Jesus! <sup>21</sup> Heaven must receive Him until the times when everything is restored, as God has promised since the world began by the mouths of His holy prophets.

1 John 3:1-7

<sup>1</sup> See what great love the Father has given to us, that we are called “the children of God”! That is what we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it has not known Him.

<sup>2</sup> Dearly loved people, we are now the children of God, but it has not yet been shown what we shall be. We know that, when He appears, we shall be like Him because we shall see Him as He is.

<sup>3</sup> Everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure. <sup>4</sup> Everyone who keeps on committing sin also keeps on committing lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness. <sup>5</sup> You also know that He appeared to take away our sins, and there is no sin in Him. <sup>6</sup> No one who remains in Him keeps on sinning. No one who keeps on sinning has seen Him or known Him. <sup>7</sup> Little children, let no one lead you astray! Whoever does what is right is righteous, as He is righteous.

Luke 24:36-49

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<sup>41</sup> While they were still so overwhelmed with joy that they could not believe it, He asked them, “Do you have anything here to eat?”

<sup>42</sup> They gave Him a piece of broiled fish. <sup>43</sup> He took it and ate it while they watched Him.

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<sup>49</sup> “I am sending you what My Father has promised. Wait here in the city until you are armed with power from above!”