

Acts 3:12-19; Psalm 4; 1 John 3:1-7; Luke 24:36b-48

“He opened their minds”

*Grace to you, and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.*

Today’s gospel begins immediately after the two disciples who had walked with Jesus on the road to Emmaus reported this to the eleven disciples in Jerusalem. Yet Jesus’ disciples were not quick to believe the Easter message they had heard first from the women who had visited the tomb, then from Simon, and now also from the two who had walked with Jesus to Emmaus.

Yet Jesus sought these disciples out in their doubt and fear, saying, “*Peace be with you.*” Sensing their anxiety, Jesus said to them, “*Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts?*” Yet even after seeing his hands and feet, they still wavered between joy and doubt. Jesus’ own followers were the hardest to convince!

Just as Jesus had done on the road to Emmaus, he opened the disciples’ minds to understand the scriptures. If they were to be his witnesses, Jesus needed to overcome their closed-mindedness. Like them and every believer before us, we too need Jesus to overcome our own doubts, fears, and closed-mindedness. What is at stake here is not simply book-knowledge or memorizing scripture, but rather, an encounter with Christ alive and present in the scriptures. He is the living word, always opening our minds to the living power of his cross and resurrection.

The most well-known example of this is perhaps Paul, who having experienced Christ on the road to Damascus later wrote to the Philippians, “*Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus...*” who emptied himself, becoming a servant, even to death on a cross. Easter is the joy of knowing him alive in every nation and tongue confessing him as Jesus Christ the Lord.

During this season of Easter, we remember again we are no different than the disciples. We, too, are constantly moved from fear and doubt to faith and witness for Christ. Amid the mind-closing and mind-numbing violence, hatred, and war of this world, Jesus comes to us again and again, overcoming our fears, saying, “*Peace be with you.*” Again and again, he opens our minds to his living presence, calling us to be his witnesses – his hands and voices in this world.

Jesus opens our minds to his peace; he opens our minds to our need of forgiveness; he opens our minds to the needs of others; and he opens our hearts, hands, and voices to become his witnesses to all nations and people.

If the disciples were being sent to all nations and people, they would need to be of the same

mind as Christ. Like them, without sharing the mind of Christ, we cannot share Christ with others. Like them, Christ also overcomes our biases of culture, politics, economics, and even religion so we might become witnesses of God's forgiveness and love.

How did early Christians accomplish this? Their witness to Christ spread from Jerusalem north to Antioch where believers were first called "Christians"; their witness spread to Phoenicia and Cyprus, and further north to Bithynia and Pontus, across the Mediterranean to Ephesus and Philippi, and on to Athens, Corinth, and to Rome all within the span of 100 years. How did they accomplish this amazing work in a time before modern advantages of communication and travel? How did they overcome profound differences between people to create a community that is global, of one faith, one baptism, and one Lord? Christianity is truly the oldest living global community in the world. How did they do it?

They crossed the boundaries of nation, language, culture, and ethnicity with minds opened by Christ, so they could live as Jesus Christ with others. They treated others as sisters and brothers, as children of God. They welcomed others who were different from themselves as members of God's family – Christ's body transforming difference through unity in Christ. As Christ had welcomed them, they welcomed others.

Today's reading from 1 John witnesses to this welcome with a uniquely Johannine phrase, "*children of God.*" Unique to John's gospel and letters, Christians are called "children of God," witnessing to Christ's uniting of a humanity divided by distance, language, and ethnicity. John writes, "*See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God, and that is what we are.*"

Christ opens our minds to see sisters and brothers across the world as part of God's family transcending nation, ethnicity, gender, and identity because it is God who so loves this world. Everyone who calls upon his name, everyone who does what is righteous, everyone who loves their neighbor also shares in the mind of Christ and the love of God for this world.

Most of us probably think we are fair and open-minded people. Yet how many of us form opinions about others before we have all the facts? How many of us have judged someone before getting to know them? The biases we each carry of culture, politics, economics, and even religion often close our minds to people, rather than opening them.

In closing our minds about our neighbor, we also close our minds to Christ in our neighbor. Yet I know Christ lives in his body the church at St. Mark's, and he lives in each of you. Like

the early church of all nations, Christ has made you children of God and called you to be his witnesses in this very international “city of all nations” called Charlotte. Driving around this city, I have been amazed by its wonderful and challenging diversity. We are already amid nations and peoples of this world God so loves. We are to be his witnesses in this place!

In baptism, the God who so loves this world has called you a beloved child of God. Through the Holy Spirit, Christ has opened your minds to scripture, and in the Eucharist Christ feeds and forgives you. Each day, Jesus Christ continues to open our minds to his grace and love, calling us children of God and witnesses within this diverse city of Charlotte.

Each week Christ sends us from this place as witnesses to God’s children of many nations, ethnicities, genders, and identities.

As Christ has welcomed you into God’s family, may you also welcome others as God’s children.

Over and over, let him open your mind. Over and over, let him use your hands, feet, and voices with his love for all people. Amen.