

Eyes Open

Easter People: Part 1 “Eyes Open”

Rev. Cameron D St. Michael – April 23, 2023

3rd Sunday of Easter

Readings: 1 Peter 1:17-23; Luke 24:13-35

Reflection: Psalm 116

Greeting: Sing for joy, O heavens, and exult, O earth; break forth, O mountains, into singing! For the Lord has comforted his people, and will have compassion on his suffering ones.

Prayer: Lord of Life, submitting to death, you conquered the grave. By being lifted on a cross you draw all peoples to you. By being raised from the dead you restored to humanity all that we had lost through sin. Throughout these fifty days of Easter, we proclaim the marvelous mystery of death and resurrection. For all praise is yours, now and forever. Amen.

Reflection: Psalm 116

I love the LORD because he has heard my voice and my supplications. Because he inclined his ear to me, therefore I will call on him as long as I live. The snares of death encompassed me; the pangs of Sheol laid hold on me; I suffered distress and anguish. Then I called on the name of the LORD, “O LORD, I pray, save my life!” Gracious is the LORD and righteous; our God is merciful. The LORD protects the simple; when I was brought low, he saved me. Return, O my soul, to your rest, for the LORD has dealt bountifully with you. For you have delivered my soul from death, my eyes from tears, my feet from stumbling. I walk before the LORD in the land of the living. I kept my faith, even when I said, “I am greatly afflicted”; I said in my consternation, “Everyone is a liar.” What shall I return to the LORD for all his bounty to me? I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the LORD; I will pay my vows to the LORD in the presence of all his people. Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his faithful ones. O LORD, I am your servant; I am your servant, the child of your serving girl. You have loosed my bonds. I will offer to you a thanksgiving sacrifice and call on the name of the LORD. I will pay my vows to the LORD in the presence of all his people, in the courts of the house of the LORD, in your midst, O Jerusalem. Praise the LORD! (Psalm 116 NRSV)*

We read the words of Psalm 16 and hear of God’s mercy and grace. That we can call upon the Lord when we are distressed. That we may celebrate our salvation. How do you give thanks for God’s care? How do you celebrate God’s love in your life? How do you let others know about God’s mercy and grace? How can we come together and celebrate God’s incredible love? How has your life been changed because of Christ’s death and resurrection?

Prayer: O God, our rainbow, our dove, our promised land: In the resurrection of your Son you have brought us into your ark. Protect us from storms, and ferry us to your welcoming shore. We thank you for all you have already done and the great love that has been shown to us. We lift up our joys and our concerns, bringing all things before you. May we experience your grace in our laughter and our tears. May you strengthen us in sorrow and in celebration, knowing you are with us. And may you guide us in love, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. Alleluia.

Now let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Sermon:

Our scripture readings for today come from the New Revised Standard Version Bible. Our first reading for today comes from 1 Peter chapter 1 verse 17 through 23.

If you invoke as Father the one who judges impartially according to each person's work, live in fear during the time of your exile. You know that you were ransomed from the futile conduct inherited from your ancestors, not with perishable things like silver or gold but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without defect or blemish. He was destined before the foundation of the world but was revealed at the end of the ages for your sake. Through him you have come to trust in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your trust and hope are in God. Now that you have purified your souls by your obedience to the truth so that you have genuine mutual affection, love one another deeply from the heart. You have been born anew, not of perishable but of imperishable seed, through the living and enduring word of God. (1 Peter 1:17-23 NRSV)*

Our next reading comes from Luke chapter 24 verse 13 through 35.

Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?" They stood still, looking sad. Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?" He asked them, "What things?" They replied, "The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, and when they did not find his body there they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see him." Then he said to them, "Oh, how foolish you are and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?" Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures. As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. But they urged him strongly, saying, "Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now

nearly over.” So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him, and he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?” That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem, and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. They were saying, “The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!” Then they told what had happened on the road and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread. (Luke 24:13-35 NRSV)*

This is the word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

Today we begin our after Easter series, and we start by looking at Christ opening our eyes. And you might wonder what I mean by that. But I am really talking about being aware in our faith. To show this, I’m using our reading from Luke. This is a very familiar passage today. We have two disciples on the road to Emmaus. There is an interesting development that happens in this reading, because in their journey we see a parallel to any faith journey. Their walk to Emmaus mirrors our walk with Christ. And I think it's interesting because it really does help us to understand how our faith grows. We learn about the ways that we come to trust God, trust Christ, and trust in the promise of resurrection. And all of it comes through in this walk.

So, these two disciples are out on the road, but they don't realize that they have bumped into Jesus himself. Now this is not the only time that we have seen Christ's followers not recognize him. We saw the same thing on Easter. That Mary did not recognize Jesus until he said her name and her eyes were opened. Today, these two meet up with Jesus on the road but they're not allowed to recognize him at first. And Jesus wants to know what they're talking about. And they ask him if he's the only person in Jerusalem that has not heard what's happened. They proceed tell him about this Jesus of Nazareth. He was a prophet, and he was handed over to be crucified. They express some disappointment at this because they had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. However, they also say that some of the women of their group had astounded them with what they had to say. That just that morning they were at the tomb and Jesus wasn't there. Some of the men went to the tomb as well and didn't find him. And they're telling all this to Jesus, about what's going on, and Jesus calls them foolish. He calls them slow of heart because they still don't believe. I think this can reflect our own struggles with faith. Here they are explaining to Christ their disappointment in Christ. But it happens because they are experiencing Jesus but aren't aware of it.

I think we can do the same thing when we experience Christ. Not just in hearing about Christ. Not just being told what the Bible says. Not just being taught about what who Jesus is. But instead experiencing Christ's presence in a way that we feel. Experiencing that love in a way that warms our hearts. It can be an experience that is hard to explain. We may not even know what it is at first. So how do we come to understand? One way is the same way that these two disciples on the road experience this. The scripture is interpreted for them as a starting point. Jesus interprets the scriptures all about himself. He is explaining to them

everything that Jesus had already said at this point. That the Messiah would suffer these things but would then enter into his glory. That it was a necessary journey. And they listen. They listen and they take it all in. They try to absorb everything he is telling them so they might come to understand. And they then come to the end of this journey. And Jesus acts like he is going to keep going. He's explained everything and now will be on his way. But the two disciples urge him to stay with them. And in many ways, this is showing hospitality. That the day is now nearly over and it would be better if he stopped and stayed with them. And we again have this way that they are welcoming Christ in without fully understanding what it is they're doing. And we often see this and the way that we open ourselves up to others. When we reach out to a stranger with kindness, with compassion, and with mercy, that we are reaching out to Christ without knowing it. Because it was Jesus who told us that when we feed the hungry, we are feeding him. When we clothe the naked, we are clothing him. That when we care for the least and the last, we are caring for Christ. And here we have two disciples on the road inviting a stranger to stay with them. Because it may not be safe on the road at night. And so, they show him a kindness and a mercy. And without knowing it, they have welcomed Christ in. So, Jesus goes in to stay with them. And they come together at the table. And it's here that we have our revelation. He sits down and breaks bread with them. He blesses it and gives it to them, and their eyes are opened. As soon as they recognize who it is that he has broken and blessed the bread he is gone. They ask each other how they didn't see it sooner. That they could feel it burning within them when he was opening the Scriptures to them. That they had a feeling they couldn't explain before, but now they can. And they realize they should have known all along that it was Christ walking with them. They have the recognition that they have learned of Christ and welcomed him in, and now they understand. Now they believe. Right then and there they get up and return to Jerusalem. It is there they find the eleven as well as their fellow disciples. And they share their experience with the risen Savior.

The reason that I wanted to talk about this as a parallel for any faith journey is because of just how this plays out. As we see these two walking on the road, we see them growing in knowledge. That they know about Jesus and think they understand what he taught but have yet to experience the resurrection. And when they do understand the resurrection, it changes them. It changes their entire outlook. They go on this faith journey without knowing they're on a faith journey. But when their eyes are opened, they understand. They then see everything around them and understand. They understand God's great love as they understand that Christ has been raised from the dead so that they can live. I think it's important that we see ourselves on that same journey. Because often we can hear about Christ but it's when we experience him that our hearts grow. That we have that burning feeling knowing this is God at work. Because I think it also teaches us about how Christ can come in unexpected ways in our lives, and that we must keep our eyes open for every chance to meet him on the road. Because we are always given new opportunities to serve God even when we aren't sure what they are. But we keep our eyes open, and we follow Christ, doing what he told us to do so that we can grow in our trust of God. That we experience the resurrection when we experience the love that God has

for us. When we trust God, knowing that we have been redeemed. That we are no longer slaves to sin and death, but we are born anew. That we are of the Spirit and because of that we are called to love.

We see that reflected in the journey that those two disciples had. Because in the midst of not knowing what to do next, when they are told all of these wonderful things, they then invite a stranger in and share with him. I think that's wonderful because it says to me that even when we aren't sure what comes next, even when we aren't sure about everything that's happening around us, it is still important to do the right thing and to love. That even when things seem to be in disarray, we do the right thing and we care, because our eyes are open. So, I leave you with this. I think it's important for us to keep our eyes open on this faith journey because we will see Christ in unexpected places and unexpected ways. Because we will see him as a stranger on the road. We will see him as a beggar on the street corner. We will see him as the marginalized, as the outcast, as the reviled and the persecuted. Because in some ways Christ will only be in unexpected places if we don't expect to see him where love is needed. And so, I urge you with eyes open to go forth in the love of Christ and share the hope that the resurrection has given you. That if your heart has swelled because the love of God has filled it because you know that your risen Savior has saved you through love then go and share that love with others. And may we share the hope that Easter gives so that we may be Easter people, with eyes open, with hearts open, and with arms open, ready to care and ready to love just as our Savior loves us. Amen.

Prayer of Confession and Pardon: God, you are with us even when we turn away from you. Guide us back into your loving arms. Judge us not by the perfection of our actions but show us mercy and love. We have strayed like lost sheep from your ways, failing both in what we have done and what we have failed to do. Bring us back into your fold that you may guide us and lead us in all things. For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy upon us and forgive us. May we walk in your love and trust your ways. Amen.

Almighty God have mercy upon you. May the Lord forgive all your sins and lift you up in love through Jesus Christ our Lord, and by the Holy Spirit keep you in life eternal. Amen.

Offering: If you are so moved to make an offering, you may send it to the church treasurer, or you may send it to the PO Box listed below. We are still the church, and the church still needs your support to keep doing all the important work that we do.

Lord's Prayer

Dismissal with Blessing: May we go forth reflecting God's love in our lives as we go forth in the peace of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our Current Series – Easter People

Our current series looks at how we live as people who are forever changed by the Easter miracle. Each week we explore another aspect of how our lives are changed because of Christ and how we are called to live as Easter people.

April 23rd – Eyes Open – 1 Peter 1:17-23; Luke 24:13-35

April 30th – Stray Sheep – 1 Peter 2:19-25; John 10:1-10

May 7th – Finding the Way – 1 Peter 2:2-10; John 14:1-14

May 14th – One in Love – 1 Peter 3:13-22; John 14:15-21

May 21st – Yours, Mine, and Ours – 1 Peter 4:12-14; 5:6-11; John 17:1-11

Prayer List

Rev Charliam Renner	Bishop Frank Beard	Our Conference	Our Healthcare Workers
Patti Corder and the Greenup	Ambulance Crew	Our Healthcare Workers	Eric Veach
Ed & Verna Titus	Henry Catey	Jake Kiser	Cindy Cisney
Tricia Adkins	Don Stewart	Ronnie Winstead	Lauren Stewart
Phyllis Gabel	Tom Finley	Laura Carlen	Rosie Chancellor
Chuck Hogan	Brittany Gilbert	Phil Hawickhorst	Ray Carr
Jane Williams	Alice Sherwood	Richard Durham	Kathy Hanks
Steve Carlen	Emily Blade	Tim Schnauz	Donna Carlen
Ernie Peters	Jess Shoot	Stanley Kiser	Corine Howard
Don Gilmore	Shirley Jester	Connie Brown	Jack Pitcher
Don Blade	Leo Westjohn	Marsha Overton	Darin Pease
Linda Carlen	Michael Nichols	Larry Heueman	Paul Cox
Family of Raymond Shook	Taylor Waldorf	Harriet Tucker	Becky McGuiness
Gary & Mary Winterrowd	Leo Smith	Sue & Bob Smyser	Larry Thompson
Evelyn Sue Icenogle	Greg Williams	Martha Roberts	Charlie & Charlotte Baxter
Paul Schulte	Lavon Figgins	Kara Newton	

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