

## **The Third Sunday of Easter + May 8, 2011**

Last week I spoke of “Practicing Resurrection.” Each week during these 50 days of Easter we will reflect on what practicing resurrection looks like. What does it look like to live as Easter people? Last Sunday we spoke of practicing forgiveness as a way of practicing resurrection. This week I would like to suggest *being open* as a way of practicing resurrection.

When I lived in Portland I would routinely drive by a United Methodist Church with a sign that read: “Open Hearts. Open Minds. Open Doors.” I always thought that was a great slogan and later learned that it was the slogan for the entire United Methodist denomination. It’s not a bad description of the Christian life and the purpose of the church. We are called to be so open. But open to what? How are we called to be open? And what are we called to be open to? A friend of mine likes to cynically say that people can be so open minded that their brains fall out. Can we be open minded and principled at the same time? Can we have hearts and open minds while embracing core values? What does it look like to be open?

Well, that is where today’s Gospel is so very helpful. For what happens in this story is that people’s lives are being open not to everything in general but to someone very specific: to the presence of the Risen Jesus and it is the Risen Jesus himself who makes this happen.

Two of Jesus’ followers are walking the road to Emmaus. They are stricken with grief. Their spirits are cast down and they are in despair because Jesus died. Then Jesus walks alongside them. They do not recognize him. He appears to them as a stranger. But he proceeds to open the Scriptures to them. He opens their minds and hearts to truly understand what the Scripture is saying. Essentially, he tells them that the Scripture is all about him! Then they invite him to come to their home and in the blessing and breaking of bread suddenly their eyes are opened and they recognize Jesus. Then he vanishes from their sight. No, the Risen One cannot be captured or contained or controlled but that does not stop the Risen Jesus from changing their lives. He opens them up. Later they reflect on what happened: “Were not our hearts burning within us when he spoke to us on the road and opened up the Scriptures for us?” And then they go to tell others about what they had seen and heard. What did they see? What did they hear? They saw the Risen Christ. They heard him speak. They were opened up. Their eyes were opened to his presence. Their hearts and minds became opened to his word and it is the Risen Jesus himself who made this happen.

You might be saying, why I wish I were there or I wish I had that experience. Why doesn’t Jesus appear to do that for me or for us? Well, here’s the surprising and astonishing news: Jesus does. Even as we speak.

Notice how this story parallels what happens here this morning and every Sunday morning. When we gather to celebrate Holy Communion or the Eucharist, the journey to Emmaus happens all over again. Easter happens all over again. For the Risen appears to us again. The Scriptures are opened up to us. Not to inform us but to move us, to stir our hearts and minds. Then when we share the Lord's Supper and the Risen Lord is with us in a very special way and our eyes are open to his presence and we are given new sight. Our hearts and minds are opened at the Word. Our eyes are opened at the Meal. And it is the Risen Jesus who is in our midst who makes this happen again and again and again.

We need the presence of the Risen Lord in Word and this Supper if we are to truly be open and to be so open is to practice justice and love in a very specific way. In a Jesus kind of way.

Let me give you an example: this past week the news has been all about the death of Osama bin Laden. All the world responded to this news in various ways. How do we respond? How do we respond not so much as Americans but as Christians? We certainly cannot help but respond as Americans for we were victims of this man's hatred but as Christians, called to follow Jesus, and called to practice resurrection we respond to such things in a way that is different than prevailing or popular sentiment. On one hand we who renounce the ways of evil at our Baptism do not take it lightly and we know that perpetrators of great evil must be held accountable. On the other hand, as those who worship the Prince of Peace, we never, never rejoice in the death of any human being, even our enemy and, yes, even a perpetrator of hatred. For we are all called to look honestly at the world and that includes looking honestly at ourselves and understand as Alexander Solzhenitsyn once said, that the line between good and evil crosses through every human heart. And we are called to remember that in God's ways, justice is not the same thing as revenge. Biblically speaking, justice is always about respecting each and every human being. So, violence only serves to bring others down and not lift them up. Violence only begets violence. Hatred only begets hatred. We are called to bear witness to another reality. We are called to be OPEN to the truth of God.

Now, that Jesus way of living isn't always easy but that is why I need, you need, we all need and that is why we must return to the table of the Risen Jesus again and again. For it is only the Risen Jesus who opens us up to the ways of God. Without the help of the Risen Jesus we cannot see this vision of love nor can we live it out. So we come, Sunday after Sunday, to the Table of the Word and the Risen Jesus opens our hearts and minds. And we come to the Table of the Supper where our eyes are open and our sight is restored. For around this table God creates a new community, a new world and shows forth God's vision for how the world must be.

In the Emmaus story we heard that when Jesus was at table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. The same happens here where Jesus is our host. Bread is taken and blessed and broke and given and shared. In gratitude we bless God for all that God has done for us and plead for the Spirit's presence among us and in these simple gifts. Bread is broken and shared and the Risen One always obliges by giving us more than we ask. And in sharing bread and sipping wine as unremarkable as that might seem, in these ordinary yet sacred actions, we are inserted again into a brand new world. We pray for open minds and hearts and most especially for open eyes.

I love these words from the *Book of Common Prayer*: "Open our eyes to see your hand at work in the world about us. Deliver us from the presumption of coming to this Table for solace only, and not for strength; for pardon only, and not for renewal. Let the grace of this Holy Communion make us one body, one spirit in Christ, that we may worthily serve the world in his name." Amen.