

“Truly Opened Minded”

Luke 24:36-49

April 15, 2018

3rd Sunday of Easter

It is one of the most serious secular sins you can commit. Just the mere accusation of it can, at best, make you cringe or, at worst, stop you in your tracks and shut you up. It is usually leveled against people who are conservative and often Christian. Although it could be argued that those of a liberal persuasion can be equally guilty of this sin, it is only conservatives, especially Christians, who suffer the consequences for this accusation. What is this horrible accusation, this sin of all sins? It is when someone comes up to you, usually in the midst of a discussion or argument, and say to your face, “You are just so close minded!” To be called that is frustrating and it often hurts.

On the other hand, one of the greatest moral virtues in our culture today and one of the finest compliments you can be paid is when someone comes up to you and says, “You are just one of the most open-minded persons there is.” We like the sound of that. It sounds so progressive, so modern, and so helpful. To be called that may instill pride in many people and certainly makes them feel good about themselves and the positions they hold.

If being open-minded were only a matter of being willing to entertain new ideas that might improve life and if being close minded was simply rejecting and ignoring anything new that might improve life, we wouldn't have a problem with that. However, something has changed in the area of what it means to be close minded and what it means to be open-minded especially when it comes to the subject of God. Either the definitions have changed or the application of these concepts has changed. Open-mindedness can now be a more “in-your-face proposition”. Now, it seems that to be open-minded is to question, challenge, reject, or replace certain things that are good and have been well established for many years.

For example, it is considered to be open-minded to question the notion of a single God. It is more progressive and more sensitive to consider the existence (or at least, the worship of) many gods with no one God being more important than the others. Even the name of God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, – can be changed because it is open-minded to see such names as being sexist. It is considered to be open-minded to doubt and even deny that Jesus is the unique Son of God. Every year around Christmas and then Easter national news magazines produce stories which doubt the virgin birth of Jesus, the belief that Jesus is the Son of God, the idea that Jesus Christ rose from the dead, and many other things.

Certainly, this open-mindedness is used with regard to moral issues as well. It is open-minded to accept any and every sexual preference and practice as being good and equal to other practices. It is open-minded to view abortion, euthanasia, and other destructive practices as acceptable and regrettably necessary.

To be considered “close minded” is to be the theological and moral bogeyman. It is close minded to proclaim one God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – as the one and only true God. It is close minded to believe that Jesus is the one and only way to salvation. It is close minded to deny anyone their sexual or moral desires. To hold to

the inerrancy and the infallibility of the Bible and to order your life and beliefs according to this understanding will make you a social, moral, and theological pariah in our world today.

So what do we do? As Christians, we are not immune from the desire to go along with the crowd in what we teach, believe, confess, and live because we want the cool kids to like us. We want to be accepted and respected. We want to get along to get along. So we try to give the appearance of being open-minded. In some instances, Christians and some Christian bodies have actually become open-minded in the sense that the world understands. They constantly change their morality and theology to fit the changing cultural norms.

At best, we may become depressed and disheartened. We may reject any possibility of ever being considered open-minded. In fact, for some Christians, "open-minded" has become a buzzword for something very evil. But I'm here today to tell you it is not. It is a good thing to be open-minded as we see in our Gospel reading for today.

The world got in the trouble which it is today because Adam and Eve were open-minded. Instead of trusting God's care for them, His presence with them, and His plan for their future and holding on to these things, they decided to be open-minded with regard to doubting God's Word (and finally disregarding it), trying something new (eating the forbidden fruit), with the hope that it would produce new and better results.

Ever since then, sin results by being open-minded with regard to what God has said and what He desires us to do. Instead of retaining the old theology and the old morality, we have tried to be open-minded in excusing, accepting, and implementing new theologies and new moralities. Instead of improving our situation, such an attitude and plan of action draws us further away from God and puts us on the path to eternal death.

It is thought that we need to be more close minded in the area of our Christian faith. The disciples of Jesus thought that was what they were doing. They held on to the old ideas of who the Messiah would be and what He would come to do. He would be a mighty king who would score military and political victories. He would establish a new kingdom here on earth based on strength and power and might. Many believed that life would consist of acquiring more wealth, more power, and more years for when one died, he was dead. This would be evidenced by the Messiah who would live a long and powerful life and then would die.

However, Jesus actually came to make people more open-minded than they had been before. It was not that He came to bring new theologies, new moralities, or new understanding of salvation. He came to help people see, believe, and understand that God was doing a whole new thing and not the old ideas which people had before.

Jesus came, not in the role of a royal and wealthy King to conquer His enemies and then to be served by them. Rather, He came in the role of a humble and poor servant to offer up His life on the cross as the payment for His enemies in order that they may become His friends. He would not be a political and military figure with many years of success and victory like, for example, King David and then die. Jesus would

come as a spiritual and godly servant who would die and then be raised to life, never to die again.

The open-mindedness which Jesus came to proclaim extended far beyond His identity and his mission. The new and better understanding of the Kingdom of God would be that it was not restricted by geographical, racial, spatial or, chronological limitations. It would be open to all who believed in Him, whether Jew or Gentile, man or woman, first century occupant or occupant from any time in the past or the future, those who lived in Israel or those who lived in lands not yet even discovered at the time of Jesus' death and resurrection.

The open-mindedness of life in the kingdom of God is a new life brought about by Jesus' resurrection from the dead. No one is born into this kingdom by virtue of his nationality, his religiosity, or his moral virtue. All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. Jesus came, not to improve or refurbish life as it is now, but to give a whole new life based on the forgiveness of sin for all who repent and believe in Jesus Christ Himself. This would be life as God always intended for it to be in the Garden of Eden and for all eternity.

The challenge is and always has been how to depart from the close-mindedness of limiting Jesus to being a human being, the kingdom of God to a place, citizenship to the meritorious, and the abundant life to a time here on this planet and being able to be open-minded and see Jesus as the one and only Son of God, the kingdom of God as the rule and reign of God in the hearts, minds, and lives of His people, membership in the kingdom of God open to all who believe, and the new life as a radical transformation of a person which begins now, goes past the grave, and last for eternity.

It is evident that we cannot become truly biblically open-minded on our own. The disciples were with Jesus for three straight years, hearing him preach and teach, and seeing how he lived. Yet, when the rubber hit the road, they couldn't accept the new things: that Jesus would be captured, tortured, and killed on the cross; that He would gloriously and miraculously rise from death to life on the third day, and that the preaching of repentance and forgiveness of sins to the world would be their job.

We are no better. We have the Word of God. We have many new technologies to spread, teach, and bring the Word of God to ourselves, our families, our churches, our communities, and our nation. However, if we fail to hear; if we hear, but fail to believe; if we believe, but fail to behave in accordance with what we believe; we remain close minded. Only Jesus can open our minds so that we become truly open-minded.

Jesus does that for the disciples. At first, He scolds them for their doubt and their unbelief. He provides physical proof of His resurrection to life – by inviting them to touch Him and by eating a piece of fish. But physical proofs have limited value. Here, they provided merely the identity of Jesus.

The disciples became truly open-minded because Jesus opened their minds. Through this “refresher course” Jesus opened their minds to understand the Scripture in general as the Word of God. He helped them to see that all of Scripture from the law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms were written about Him. And the focus of the message and the mission was this: “The Christ should suffer and on the third day rise

from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.”

And you know the result of this “open-mindedness”. The fact that we are talking about this in Montana, several thousand miles and several thousand years apart from this Easter evening, shows how truly open-minded disciples became and how it affected their faiths, lives, and mission.

We should take to heart the scolding of the disciples since we have done the same thing. We have the clear Word of God which we have failed to hear, believe, or put into practice. Physical proof of Jesus’ resurrection has limited value. Your experience with a son or daughter, friend, coworker, or someone with which you have engaged and proven some biblical event or doctrine, but you see no results. We remain close minded.

We and anyone to whom we speak can only become open-minded by Jesus opening our minds. The means of grace – the Word of God, Holy Baptism, and the Holy Supper of the our Lord – and the activity of the Holy Spirit with these gifts make us truly open-minded. We are able to understand the Scripture in general. It is true in what it says and it means what it claims. Our minds have been opened to receive the doctrine and put in place the life which it gives to us.

Our minds are opened to unquestionably and unreservedly believing and knowing to be true that Jesus died for our sin and that we are right with that God. We unquestionably and unreservedly believe and know to be true that Jesus Christ rose from the dead to give us new life which the grave cannot stop nor hell destroy.

Our minds are opened to seeing the mission of God’s church in the world today. It is more than paying the bills to support a building, finding volunteers to do the work of the congregation, or the filling of a budget. All of these things are important, but our minds are open to see the content of that mission – repentance and forgiveness of sin – and the application of that mission in living lives of service and obedience according to the law of God.

Don’t let anyone ever tell you that you are close minded while they brag about how open-minded they are. You and I are truly the most open-minded people there are. We have not fallen prey to the close-mindedness of this world which, under the guise of open-mindedness, continue the same old sin and unbelief. Jesus has opened our minds to reveal Himself, God’s plan for salvation, and the way we are to live in a time of the resurrection – with repentance and forgiveness – until the time of of Christ’s return to finally fulfill all things. Amen