

**3rd SUNDAY OF EASTER**  
**April 15, 2018**

Text: Luke 24:36b-48

Theme: Understand the Scriptures

Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed! Amen! Alleluia!

We begin where we left off last week when we delved into 1 John 1 – We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life.

Last Sunday we took this text and turned it into our first assignment for this Easter season. As we went about our daily responsibilities we were to become the eyes and ears of Christ and then we were to take time to reflect on all that we saw and heard so that we could step out of our faith community and touch the lives of others.

*What did we see?*

*What did we hear?*

*What did we touch?*

Let me share with you some of the things I saw and heard over the last two weeks. After the 11:00 am service on Easter Sunday one of our young people stood in line with all the adults not only to greet me but to ask me some pointed questions about the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. She listened carefully to our gospel reading for the day and she wanted to know more about the women who fled the empty tomb in fear and said nothing to anyone. Were they unable to speak? She probed some more searching for some legitimate excuse for their silence. Once we talked that through then she wanted to know why in some parts of Scripture we say that Jesus died on the cross when in other parts of the Bible it states that Jesus hung on a tree. It truly amazed me how carefully she is reading her Bible.

Fast forward one week to last Sunday. At the 9:45 am service we had three baptisms and so we had a lot of children come forward for the *Children's Message*. I gave each child a picture of a room with Jesus standing in the midst of some of his disciples. The children knew him as Jesus because of the marks on his hands. Thomas was kneeling in front of him in prayer.

We talked about the picture and then we prayed and then I invited the children to return to their seats. One of them chose to stay a little bit longer so she could tell me about the movie she saw about Jesus. She told me it made her sad the way that he died and she could not understand why people would treat Jesus in that way. She did not like that part. I agreed that it was a horrible way to die but there was more to the story and that is what we celebrate every Sunday when we come to church.

Later in the day (and now four baptisms later) I received an email from one of our older teens. He sent me a series of seven questions that he had been pondering since Easter. The essence of his questions centered on some of the most in-depth theological discussions we have had over the centuries.

What happened to those who died before the death of Christ?

If God forgave their sins then why did Jesus have to die now?

Why did God (in his omnipotence) not forgive our sins without the death of Jesus?

What role did Judas play in all of this?

Was he the antagonist or part of God's plan?

And if part of God's plan then was his sin a righteous one?

I am no theologian so I responded to his questions from my own study of Scripture that is complemented by the teachings of the Lutheran Church. In all three instances I listened to the inquisitive minds of our youth who are reading the Bible and who want to understand not only what happened to Jesus Christ but why it happened in this way. They want to know not only about their relationship to God but the relationship God has had with his people from the time of creation.

There are no quick answers to any of these questions. And I have learned with experience that with every response there is at least ten more questions that follow. But in a concise way this is what I know. From the time of creation, God initiated a relationship with his people that traveled through the Israelites all the way to us. Covenants were made along the way that the people of God could never uphold on their own. Yet the plan of God has always been to save and redeem his people and that plan evolved over time.

In the Old Testament, offerings and sacrifices were made to cleanse people from their sins. The Old Covenant that was written on stone tablets was made into a New Covenant that was written on their hearts. But by the time of the New Testament, God showed us a new and different way to be in relationship with him. God chose to make the ultimate sacrifice once and for all. And that sacrifice was through his son, Jesus Christ our Lord. God chose to come in human form so that we could visibly and tangibly walk with him on this earth and fully experience his teachings and miracles as well as his death and resurrection. Without a doubt his death was horrible but perhaps we are the ones who needed to see him die and to take his last breath before we would believe that he truly was the Son of God.

So what is our assignment for this week? It comes to us from the last three verses in our Gospel reading. It reads that Jesus opened the minds of his disciples so they could understand the Scriptures.

Our assignment this week is to follow the example of our youth and open our minds and our Bibles so that we can explore more deeply our relationship with God through Christ. No matter how many times I read the Bible I am amazed at what new insights I gain from old and familiar passages that help me in my proclamation. I get so incredibly excited over each and every new discovery because it helps me answer these complex questions that arise in the hearts of our young people. We need an open mind to understand the gift that God has given us in his word of life. We need an open mind because it allows us to think and to rethink and to rethink again what we believe about God and his Son and his church. Scripture is the living word and so it needs to stay alive in us.

One of my friends also does a weekly *Children's Message*. Last week he wanted to help the children understand the reality of God so he asked them how they knew different things were real. He held up a glass of water and asked them how they knew it was real, and before he could answer he sprinkled some water on them. The children quickly responded that it made them wet. They could feel it. Then he held up a piece of bread, and he asked them if it was real and how they knew it was real. One child spoke immediately and said that it can be broken.

His answer was so immediate that it took my friend by surprise. It was not the response he expected. He was expecting a child to say that you can eat bread and therefore you can taste it. Instead he got a very Eucharistic reply.

The child who answered attends worship almost every Sunday and every Sunday he sees Holy Communion and instinctively he thinks that the first thing we do with bread is to take it, give thanks, and then break it. God is real, Jesus Christ is real, and our worship experiences are real. It is the place where we (both adults and children) hear the word of life and experience that word in a real and tangible way as we touch the lives of others.

Our children are listening.

Our children are reading their Bibles.

We join them this week in opening our minds to the word of life.

Amen