

Sunday, April 15, 2018

I John 3:1-7

Luke 24:13-31, 36-48

Open Minds, Open Hearts

Have you ever been really, really surprised? That is, someone or a group of people have surprised you with a party, a special gift, or even a special get away or experience. It is an amazing experience when this does happen because not only is the party, gift or experience a wondrous opportunity, but the fact is that it was a surprise means you weren't involved in the planning or preparations. If you have been involved the planning of a surprise—it is also exciting but you just hope no one opens their mouth or in today's world, texts or emails the recipient of the planned surprise ruining it all for everyone.

Our reading from Luke 24 is Luke's version of the story of Jesus' resurrection and occurs while the disciples are gathered together in the room afraid yet just having heard that Jesus alive. Two of these followers one named Cleopas leave Jerusalem and are heading home to Emmaus. As they were talking with each other about everything that had happened, a stranger joins them and they begin to discuss what happened. Cleopas is surprised by the stranger not knowing of the events of Christ's resurrection so he tells the stranger the story. But when he finishes the story the stranger surprises them. He says, "How foolish you are—and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets spoke about! The Christ had to suffer all these things and then enter his glory."

The stranger wasn't angry but then uses the walk to tell the prophecy of the coming of the messiah from scriptures. While all this storytelling is happening they are making their way closer to Emmaus. When they arrived, the disciples asked the man to stay with them as it was getting dark and they were ready for something to eat. So the man stayed. Before they ate, the stranger- took bread, gave thanks, broke it and gave it to the new friends at the table. Jesus big surprise then happens. But not in the way of jumping up and down and him screaming, 'I'm Jesus, I'm alive! What occurs is that in an instant Cleopas and the other disciple's "eyes were opened." They saw the stranger and recognized this man. This was really the Christ Jesus alive and in the house with them. All along the 7 mile road trip, Jesus walked and talked, listened and taught them and they did not know him. How could they NOT know Jesus? Because they were not open to receiving him just yet. They needed to learn what Jesus had taught about the scriptures and the prophecy about the Christ who would come and save them They needed Jesus to reveal himself when it was the right time.

Then Jesus disappeared. These disciples were surprised but at first were in shock and tried to figure out why they didn't know him. But when they realized who he was, they were very excited and they went back to Jerusalem to tell the other disciples that they had seen Jesus.

Meanwhile at the place where the disciples were, Jesus appears and says "peace be with you." This is a part of the story shared last week. But what is interesting in this version of Jesus resurrection story is that the disciples use all their senses to experience Jesus' surprise return!

The disciples see him in front of them. They hear his words and his familiar voice calms their hearts. They are encouraged to touch his hands and his side. They can probably smell him with the many oils, perfumes and creams that had been rubbed into his body for burial and can taste these oils in the air. Jesus also eats the broiled fish given to him and one can almost taste it as he eats in front of them. So in this experience—Jesus fully opens their senses to his presence. Yes they are surprised by his coming amongst them but the element of surprise—soon dissipates—for they realize within their whole being, Jesus is alive. And then Jesus left.

What does this mean for the disciples who walked with Jesus for 3 years and did not understand what was to happen? What occurred when Cleopas and the other disciple return to Jerusalem later in the night is not written. But when Cleopas tells the story of what happened as they walked, talked and listened to Jesus, the scriptures and prophecies would also be pointed out. Was this the teaching moment for the disciples to finally realize that Jesus is the Son of God, the Messiah, the Christ?

Was the surprise really on them? They should know that the words of the prophets pointed to the messiah who would come, die and rise? How come they didn't know or understand this? Because their minds were not open to this reality. Because their hearts were grieving and mourning the death of what was, they could not accept the new reality—Jesus is alive.

They had hidden for 3 days with shame and hurt in their hearts. They had run away when accused of being a follower of Jesus. They knew that Judas had betrayed Jesus and they were seen with Jesus. They knew that their lives were in jeopardy. But with Jesus being alive—of what were they afraid now? They were afraid because they did not fully know that Jesus was the Son of God, and now they needed to fully commit to this.

What about you? Have you been in the know about some information and then withheld it from others because it was on a need to know basis? May be you are the one who wanted the information and couldn't get it. What did you do?

For the disciples the knowledge of Jesus as the Messiah was in their minds—they had been taught the scriptures from an early age. But because of their trauma of Jesus' death they had closed both the hearts and minds to the possibility of Jesus being the Christ or even the messiah.

How open are your hearts and minds to this knowledge of Jesus being alive? When we say that after Jesus was buried and then his body disappeared what are we trying to tell others? Was Jesus really dead? Is Jesus really alive? Does it make a difference? Yes. By faith we believe that the prophets of old knew that a messiah was needed in order to save the people from their sins. For generations since Jesus' resurrection people have believed because they had faith and were forgiven. This is the same message that we share today over 2000 years later. But are we really convinced? Do we really believe and experience the surprise the joy, the wonder of Christ in our midst?

We may not see the image of the Jesus as the Jewish man with long hair and scars in his hands and feet to know that He is alive. But we do experience Christ's message of love when we see examples of faithfulness to his teachings—reaching out to those who are grieving, helping those who are weaker, praying for healing and teaching the stories of Jesus again and again so that it is not lost. Are we willing to do this? This is the surprise of Easter—Jesus is alive and we can recognize him in the lives of those who serve him, believe in him, trust him for he is the reason for loving acts to abound. Out of love he died, for the sake of hope and for the gift of eternal life he is alive. Are we willing to get up and tell someone else of the joy he gives to us?

Your minds and hearts have been open to the Spirit of God moving you this morning. Listen to the words of the prophets, listen to the stories of Jesus and then share his love with others. This is what we are all called to do. Because no matter where we go or what we do, we do so in the name of Christ, for Christ's sake and in love.

Your minds and hearts have been opened by our Saviour. May all who see you- see Christ Jesus in you now and always. Amen.