

When St. Luke tells us Jesus “opened *their* minds to understand the scriptures,” we tend to close ours. That’s a shame, because this story is a summary of what Luke’s Gospel is all about. But the very idea of Jesus opening our minds can be uncomfortable, perhaps a little scary.

Uncomfortable because people usually don’t like being told that our minds were closed — so closed they needed divine power to open them — that’s a little offensive. And besides, it’s human nature to use Scripture the same way we tend to use everything else, that is, to get what we want. If Jesus gives us an understanding of the Scriptures, we might not be able to use them for selfish, or self-righteous, purposes anymore! And on a more basic level, the idea of anyone messing with our minds is scary. It doesn’t feel like it’s going to work like in *The Matrix*, where someone can plug your brain into a computer, push a few buttons, and, boom! You know kung fu, or how to fly a helicopter. But *The Matrix* owes its themes and ideas to John’s Gospel, and we’re reading Luke today, and to get back to my point, it doesn’t feel like Jesus is just giving the disciples new information or skills.

He’s doing much more than that. He’s showing them a new way of understanding everything they’ve ever known and reality itself, and inevitably, this will change their lives in ways they could never foresee. That new way of understanding begins and ends with Jesus himself. This is important because from the very beginning, Christians have understood that Jesus’s body is essential for understanding who God is. Today’s Gospel passage comes immediately after the Emmaus Road story, where Jesus is revealed to two disciples in the breaking of bread, and then vanishes. At the beginning of today’s story, those two disciples had just rejoined the main disciples in Jerusalem.

The Emmaus story by itself leaves us wondering just how risen Jesus was. It almost sounds like a ghost story. And so we need today’s story to make sense of that one, and all the ones before. We could cling to the idea that our own intelligence should be enough for us to understand the Scriptures, until we realize that not only is our intelligence flawed, limited, and self-serving, but more fundamentally, God is far beyond our powers of reason. Therefore, in order for us to have any reliable knowledge of God, let alone a relationship with God, God must act. God must reveal a reality that lies outside of knowledge, reason, and nature. God must tell us a story that reveals the greater truth beyond all stories.

So every text, every lesson, every fact, even Jesus’s own teachings, everything takes on new and expanded meaning in the light of the Resurrection. For instance, the very last things Jesus did before “opening their minds” were to show them his hands and feet, and to eat a piece of fish. If anyone else had done this, let’s be honest, no one would care. Even if it had been Jesus, but during his natural life, no big whoop. To use a theological term.

But in his gloriously unnatural risen life, Jesus’s hands and feet show us that God bears suffering so intimately that woundedness is part of who God is. The distinctive wounds of the Crucifixion are so much a part of Jesus that we can use them to identify him. And by eating the fish, Jesus shows us that our bodies are sacred, that God will redeem and restore them no less than our minds and our spirits.

But of course understanding these simple acts is only the beginning of the new

understanding we have in light of the Resurrection. Saint Luke talks about understanding the Scriptures, the story of the relationship between humanity and God. “So,” as Mark Davis puts it, “let’s mark out in broad strokes what the Scriptures can mean when interpreted through the lens of resurrection. The creation stories, as resurrection stories, show death to be part of a larger story of the fertility of life. Hence, the seed must fall to the ground and die to produce abundance. The story of flood shows how, out of sheer devastation, there is a renewal of life from the remnant. The stories of the covenant that God made with Abram and Sarai show how two persons, whose own capacities for fertility were dead, bring life through which all nations will be blessed. The law is a dying and rising reality, not a dead letter etched in stone. The rise and fall of kingdoms, the suffering and return of exiles, the despair of the suffering servant, the hope of the one ‘coming in clouds,’ the expectation of Elijah’s return—all are stories of how inasmuch as God lives, so do God’s promises. Resurrection makes all the difference between seeing the Scriptures as accounts of things that happened but are not happening any more, and accounts of things that happened and marvelously continue to be happening because God lives.”

And of course his point is that understanding the Resurrection is critically important to how all Christians live our lives. For Christians, by definition, are connected to the Resurrection. By our baptism, as Nora Rosenbaum was baptized yesterday, we are baptized into the same death and Resurrection that God has used to transform history and nature, so we’d better understand what that’s all about! And what a wonderful transformation it is to be baptized into the nature of God, which is grace and life eternal.

Just as God has shown in the record of Scripture, so too in our own lives, when life and grace are attacked, we have every reason to respond with courage, determination, and hope from our belief that God is a God of life, not of death, and a God of grace, not of condemnation. We have confidence that God will get the last word, and not just in some ephemeral hereafter, but in this physical world, which God has shown to be holy. Resurrection is not so much about enduring suffering and injustice until we die and go to heaven, no! Resurrection is all about the making of life from death, righteousness from sin, justice from oppression, grace from judgment— and making them right now, in this life, this living world. In our first reading today, St. Peter set a fine example of how understanding the implications of the Resurrection can change lives. Peter spoke sharply to a skeptical crowd, not to condemn them, but to encourage them to draw closer to God, and be reconciled and forgiven.

That life of reconciliation and forgiveness is the life we share with the giver of life, the love we share with the one who so loved the world, the grace we not only enjoy, but strive to practice. The life of Resurrection is an active life, as Jesus and the apostles modeled, a life of standing up and opening other minds to the Way of grace and truth.