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St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
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“Being Truly ‘Open Minded’ ”

Text: Luke 24:36-49 (1 John 1:1-2:2)

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

In the opinion of many people in our country and world today, being “open minded” is a very good and important thing. For to be so “open minded” means that one is *tolerant* of other people, and other lifestyles, and other truths. It means that one is *willing to learn* all kinds of new things and new ways of thinking because everyone’s opinions and views are equal and equally valid and significant. And it means that one is able to *accept new ideas*, new paradigms, and new perspectives by those considered the great thinkers of our day – whoever you think those people may be. . . . And the opposite of this “open mindedness” is very bad! It is to be “close minded!” And close minded people are bad because they are considered to be intolerant, unaccepting, stuck in the past, and not open to change and new advances and new way of thinking. . . . And living in our world today, you will be lumped into one of those two categories: you will either be thought “good” because you are “open minded,” or you will be thought “bad” because you are “close minded.”

Well Jesus today speaks of being “open minded” – but what Jesus means when He speaks of being open minded is, in fact, *the very opposite* of what the world means about being open minded! For to Jesus, being open minded doesn’t mean that we open our minds to anything and everything that can rush in and fill them. No, to Jesus it means that He is the one who opens our minds, so that He can fill our minds – not with all kinds of thoughts and ideas – but with His Word and truth. The very Word and truth which the world considers believing in to be very close minded!

And so I suppose the question is really this: what is going to fill your mind? Set aside the labels of open or close minded for now, and just think: what is it that fills your mind? For if you want to be open minded and you open your mind, what rushes in? For most people, it is the wisdom of this world. The wisdom of what is broadcast on TV and radio. The wisdom that is gossiped on the internet. The wisdom of what seems best to us. And so many people’s open minds have been filled with this wisdom of man: the teaching of evolution; the doctrine that there is no absolute right or wrong, each person must decide

for themselves what is right or wrong; all religions are equal and really the same; self-gratification is the most important thing in life; sexual permissiveness is liberating; greed is good; and a whole host of other doctrines and ideas and what is passed off as “wisdom,” or enlightened and new ways of thinking. And the result is that many people’s “open minds” today closely resemble a landfill or a cesspool, because all those nuggets of worldly wisdom have been dumped in to mingle and mix and ferment together. . . . But even if you don’t like that picture (of a landfill or cesspool), you have to ask: how do you sort it all out? How do you know what’s truth and what’s falsehood? How do you know what to believe? How do you know what to follow? And the result is the confusion so evident in our world today.

And that is also the confusion that gripped the disciples after Jesus’ crucifixion and death. For when Jesus appeared to them on Easter evening, after He had risen from the dead, we heard that the disciples **“were startled and frightened and thought they saw a spirit. And Jesus said to them, ‘Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts?’”** From those words you can *kind of* get a picture of how the disciples felt, and their confusion, but one of the actual words used there I think describes it much better. For it says that the disciples didn’t just “doubt,” but that their minds were **“stirred up.”** Think of muddy water that gets stirred up, or a pot of soup that gets stirred up. All the stuff that was on the bottom gets stirred up in the water and clouds it, so that things aren’t clear anymore. . . . That’s how the disciples were. Things weren’t clear anymore. All kinds of thoughts and ideas and worldly wisdom had been stirred up in the heads and they didn’t know what to think or believe anymore. *Could someone live after they had died? Was Jesus who He said He was? Why didn’t God save Him? Could this be a real body?* . . . They were confused, as many in our world today are.

And so when Jesus comes to them, we heard this remarkable and very important statement: **“Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures.”** And whenever the Scriptures use the word “open” like that, it is always the work – not of man – but of God. *Opening* the eyes of the blind, *opening* the ears of the deaf, *opening* the mouth of the mute, *opening* the wombs of the barren, *opening* heaven. And so after He rises from the dead, Jesus comes to open the minds of His disciples and clean out the cesspool of filth and falsehood and fear and all kinds of wrong thinking and ideas, so that He could then fill their minds with His Word, and His truth, and His wisdom. . . . For only He can open our minds, closed tight by sin and death, and open them to the light of His Word and truth, to repentance and forgiveness, that we may know Him, and believe, and be saved.

And this is what the risen Christ is still doing today, here, in His church. Last week, if you remember, we considered how we are children of God, and what a good picture that is of us and our relationship to our Heavenly Father. And so think of that again today,

because we are newborn children of God, born again of water and the Spirit in Holy Baptism. . . . And so let's think about newborns. Once a child is born, what does it immediately begin to do? It begins to learn. It learns about its parents, about its environment, about itself, about eating, and a lot of other things – and it learns very quickly! Because it has to learn everything, and its mind is a sponge. But this being true, it makes *teaching* very important. And so one of the most important tasks for a parent is to teach our children. And so we teach our children to speak by speaking to them. We teach our children how to act by how we act toward them. We teach our children what is important by what we consider important. And they learn. And if not from their parents, then they will learn from other sources. But their minds are open and they will be filled – the only question is, what are they being filled with?

And so too here, in our Lord's Church. No matter how old you are, you are a child of God. Because of Christ's death and resurrection, you have been born again. You get to start all over again, with your past and your sins forgiven and behind you. A new life, an open mind, opened by Christ. And as any good parent, your Heavenly Father wants to teach you and fill your mind – with His Word, His truth, and His wisdom. That you would believe and be saved. And so just as it is with children and their parents, so it is here in the church. Children of God are taught to speak God's word by having God's Word spoken to them. Children of God learn how to act toward others by how God has acted toward them – in love and forgiveness. And children of God learn what is important by seeing what God considers important – by receiving His gifts of forgiveness, life, faith, and salvation through His Holy Word, and Holy Baptism, and Holy Communion. . . . And opened by God, our minds are filled by God with what is most sure and true; what we can count on and rely on; what will never change: Him.

And so what happened for the disciples is what happens here for us – the resurrected Christ is still coming to His disciples, opening our minds, and filling them with His wisdom and truth. And there is an important pattern there for us to consider: **that first, God acts; next, we receive from Him and learn; and then third, we act.** . . . And this is what we see with the disciples. God acted in the incarnation, and in the death and resurrection of His Son for the forgiveness of our sins, and then Christ came to His disciples, opened their minds, and filled them with all His Word and truth and wisdom. And having thus received and learned from Jesus, Jesus then sends His disciples out – *with His Spirit!* (which they are to wait for) – **to act.** To speak as they have been spoken to. To love as they have been loved. To forgive as they have been forgiven. To open minds closed tight by sin and death, so that the light of Christ might shine on them!

And this is the very thing we heard the disciples did in the reading from First John. ***“That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with***

our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life – . . . that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. And we are writing these things to you so that our joy may be complete. This is the message we have heard from Him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all.” Or in other words, no darkness means no confusion, no stirred up minds, no cesspools! In Christ there is light and clarity, direction and confidence and certainty. And only when Christ opens your mind and fills it Himself is this possible. . . . And so that is what Christ is here in His church to do. To speak His Word to you and teach you, to feed you and forgive you, to take away your sin and guilt and fill you with His love, to give you His wisdom so that in this confusing and mixed-up world, you know what is true, and who to follow. For He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, who Himself went through death to life, that we might live a new life, as His children, not only in Heaven, but already today.

Now dear brothers and sisters in Christ, not all worldly wisdom is bad. God has blessed many people in our world all across time with great minds and intelligence, and through their work and the carrying out of their vocations, we have received many great things from God – great advances in medicine, and technology, and communications, and so many other things. And we thank God for them all. But with such great advances often comes pride and arrogance, for if we can do so much, is there anything we can't do? And so with the good has come the bad: abortion and assisted suicide and weapons of mass destruction, instead of respect for life; cloning and the super-abundance of internet pornography, instead of chastity and commitment; evolutionary thinking turning us into dog-eat-dog people, and the mentality of the survival of the fittest instead of helping and serving your neighbor. . . .

No, fellow children of God, not all worldly wisdom is bad, but there is a higher wisdom with which our minds must be filled. Which must rule all worldly wisdom, that we know what is true and what is false; what is good and what is not; what is godly and what must be left aside. . . . So receive that wisdom. Hear; receive from Him and learn; and then act. Hear your Father speak to you, receive His gifts and learn of Him, having your minds opened by Him and filled with Him and His life. And then act. Act with His life, His Spirit, His words, His truth, His love, His forgiveness. And as you do, the Spirit of Christ will work through you to open the hearts and minds of others, for only He can do it. And thus joined with Christ in the unity of faith, there will be great joy – the joy of the resurrection, the joy of life, the joy of sins forgiven . . . the joy that comes from being children of God.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus our Lord unto everlasting life. Amen.