

OPENING PRAYER

Holy and Loving God, we praise You for calling us to be Your people and for saving us and gathering us together in the name of Your only begotten Son. Your mercy, Your grace, Your tenderness, O Lord, are only exceeded by Your power and Your glory and Your love. We pray that You would renew us this day through the ministry of Your Holy Spirit. Forgive those things in our lives that have offended You, and hurt our neighbours, and disfigured our own selves; the selves You made to reflect and show forth the beauty of your nature.

May we hear Your holy word as You intend us to hear it, and may we glorify Christ Jesus, Your living Word, in all that we say and do.

Lord, You know our hearts, You know our needs, and You know the hearts of those around us and their needs. We lift ourselves and them before you at this time.

We specially hold before today those in hospital, who are alone or who are grieving the loss of a loved one. We pray for those who are lost and don't have anyone to turn to or to be by their side. We ask that they will allow someone to show them Your love and that they may know You are with them and that they are Your child.

Lord, we hold before you too all children around this world who go to bed at night hungry, who don't have a place to lay their head in this world.

Lord, hear our prayers now and as we continue to worship you.

Silence

All these things we ask in Your name who taught us to pray saying;

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen

OFFERTORY PRAYER

Lord Jesus, we offer these gifts in gratitude and in obedience, thanking You for the hope that You have given us through Your death and resurrection, and praying that in all that we say and do, we may bestow upon others the riches of Your love.

Grant that our gifts may be blessed and that we may be worthy witnesses to Your most holy name.

Amen.

ACTS 3:1-19

One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer--at three in the afternoon. {2} Now a man crippled from birth was being carried to the temple gate called Beautiful, where he was put every day to beg from those going into the temple courts. {3} When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money. {4} Peter looked straight at him, as did John. Then Peter said, "Look at us!" {5} So the man gave them his attention expecting to get something from them. {6} Then Peter said, "Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk." {7} Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man's feet and ankles became strong. {8} He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God. {9} When all the people saw him walking and praising God, {10} they recognized him as the same man who used to sit begging at the temple gate called Beautiful, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him. {11} While the beggar held on to Peter and John, all the people were astonished and came running to them in the place called Solomon's Colonnade. {12} When Peter saw this, he said to them: "Men of Israel, why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk? {13} The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus. You handed him over to be killed, and you disowned him before Pilate, though he had decided to let him go. {14} You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you. {15} You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this. {16} By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus' name and the faith that comes through him that has given this complete healing to him, as you can all see. {17} "Now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders. {18} But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Christ would suffer. {19} Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord,

LUKE 24:33-48

They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together {34} and saying, "It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon." {35} Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread. {36} While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." {37} They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. {38} He said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? {39} Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have." {40} When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet. {41} And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, "Do you have anything here to eat?" {42} They gave him a piece of broiled fish, {43} and he took it and ate it in their presence. {44} He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms." {45} Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. {46} He told them, "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, {47} and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. {48} You are witnesses of these things.

"SO THEY COULD UNDERSTAND"

Bless Thou the words of my lips and the meditations of our heart that they be of profit to us and acceptable to thee, our Rock and our Redeemer.

The text of today's sermon is taken from the gospel reading.

We heard in that reading, that on the day of His resurrection Jesus appeared to His disciples and

showed them the marks of His love; those marks engraved on His hands and feet, and in His side.

Then, while reminding them of what He had said before He died, He opened their minds so they could understand the scriptures, telling them:

"This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in His name to all nations, beginning in Jerusalem."

He opened their minds so that they could understand the scriptures.

I've thought a bit about this, and I've wondered, why didn't Jesus do this earlier?

Why didn't Jesus open their minds to understand the scriptures and then explain it to them before He died?

Surely it would have made it easier for them; easier for them to believe in Him, easier for them to follow Him, easier for them to accept the miracle of His resurrection.

Surely everything could have gone so much better during the days of Jesus' ministry if His disciples had understood the scriptures at that time.

But they didn't understand. Instead, throughout the gospels we see the disciples bumbling and stumbling, and we see Jesus rebuking them and teaching them over and over again the right way.

So, why did Jesus wait to open their minds so that they could understand the scriptures and thereby understand Him?

I believe that the answer lies in the fact that the disciples had to experience the reality of Jesus' death and resurrection before they could really understand the Bible.

Their hearts and minds could not be opened, they could not possibly understand, until they were prepared for it by all of what they had heard, seen, and felt with Jesus.

The story is told of the explorer who some years ago had just returned to his country from the Amazon.

The people at home were eager to learn all about the vast and mighty river and the country surrounding it. But how he wondered, could he ever describe it to them. How could he ever put into words the feelings that flooded into his heart when he saw the exotic flowers and heard the night sounds of the jungle. How could he communicate to them the smells that filled the air and the sense of danger and excitement that would come whenever he and his fellow explorers encountered strange animals or paddled through treacherous rapids??

So, the explorer did what all good explorers do. He said to the people, "go and find out for yourselves what it is like", and to help them he drew a map of the river pointing out the various features of its course and describing some of the dangers and some of the routes that could be used to avoid those dangers.

The people took the map and they framed and hung on the wall of the local science museum so that everyone could look at it. Some made copies of it. After a period of time many of those who made copies for themselves considered themselves experts on the river and indeed they knew its every turn and bend. They knew how broad it was and how deep, where the rapids were and where the falls. They knew the river and they instructed others in what it was like whenever those people indicated an interest in it.

I think that many people today are in the same situation. They know the scriptures, but they do not understand them.

They do not understand them because they are passive concerning the Word of God. They fail to link their experiences to it and allow the experiences and the prophecies in it to link themselves to them.

They haven't entered into the wholeness of the message.

Rather, some parts they have accepted, and other parts they have rejected or ignored without ever considering the connections between the parts. A lot of us are like the disciples before Easter Sunday.

We shrink away from much of what Jesus says and we don't want to hear about carrying the burdens of others. We don't want to hear about suffering for love. We don't want to hear about giving up family and home for the sake of the gospel. We don't want to hear about how good people, people like Jesus, have to die before they can become fully alive.

This material from scripture is not good news to us, just as it was not good news to the disciples. We can't see how or why it might be important for us.

Rather, for us, as for the disciples, good news, welcome news, consists of hearing about the glory given to the faithful, of hearing how the righteous will be given power, the humble given the earth, and the poor in Spirit the kingdom of heaven. But without the one there cannot be the other.

We can't have the earth unless we carry the burdens of others.

We can't have the Kingdom of heaven without the willingness to put God before our own desires and our own families.

We can't have power without the willingness to suffer, and we can't have glory without the willingness to die.

Until we understand that, until our minds are opened to see the links between what we are now and what will be later, between what we experience now and what we will experience later, until we see the links between death and resurrection, the scriptures are a closed book.

This is why Jesus did not open the minds of the disciples so that they could understand the scriptures before his resurrection.

Until Jesus rose, the disciples did not have the experience they needed to have to have open minds.

Until He rose, the link between death and resurrection existed in their minds only as an unpleasant idea. It certainly was not there as a glorious reality.

Jesus' life, death and resurrection is the link between our experience and the message of the scriptures.

He is the link that can open our minds, so that we might understand the scriptures, and so that we might understand our own lives.

On the first Easter Sunday Jesus did not give His disciples special knowledge so that they could understand the scriptures.

What He did was open their minds. He reminded them of what they had experienced with Him, and of what they were even then experiencing with Him. He pointed to the scriptures which spoke of that experience. He made the connections for them.

He said *"this is what I told you while I was still with you: everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms.*

This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations.

We understand the scriptures and their message when we know both Jesus's death and His resurrection, both in our faith *about* Him, and in our faith *with* Him inside our lives.

A Jesuit Priest once told, or I should say retold this children's story when preaching on the message of today's scripture. It goes like this:

A grandfather and a grandmother are in a gift shop looking for something to give their granddaughter for her birthday. Suddenly the grandmother spots a beautiful teacup.

"Look at this lovely cup", she says to her husband. He picks it up and says, "You're right! This is one of the loveliest teacups I have ever seen."

At that point something remarkable happened; something that could only happen in a children's book. The teacup says to the grandparents, "Thank you for the compliment, but I wasn't always beautiful."

Instead of being surprised that the cup can talk, the grandfather and grandmother ask it, "What do you mean when you say you weren't always beautiful?"

"Well", says the teacup, "once I was just an ugly, soggy lump of clay. But one day some man with dirty wet hands threw me on a wheel. Then he started turning me around and around until I got so

dizzy I couldn't see straight. 'Stop! Stop!', I cried.

"But the man with the wet hands said, 'Not Yet!' Then he started to poke me and punch me until I hurt all over. 'Stop! Stop!', I cried. But the man said, 'Not Yet'.

"Finally, he did stop. But then he did something much worse. He put me into a furnace. I got hotter and hotter until I couldn't stand it. 'Stop! Stop!', I cried. But the man said, 'Not Yet'.

"Finally, when I thought I was going to burn up the man took me out of the furnace. Then some short lady began to paint me. The fumes got so bad that they made me feel sick.

"Stop, stop!", I cried. 'Not Yet!' said the lady.

"Finally, she did stop. But then she gave me back to the man again and he put me back into that awful furnace. This time it was hotter than before. 'Stop! Stop!', I cried. But the man said, 'Not Yet'.

"Finally, he took me out of the furnace and let me cool. When I was completely cool a pretty lady put me on this shelf, next to this mirror.

"When I looked at myself in the mirror, I was amazed. I could not believe what I saw. I was no longer ugly, soggy, and dirty. I was beautiful, firm, and clean. I cried for joy. It was then I realized that all the pain was worthwhile. Without it I would still be an ugly, soggy lump of wet clay. It was then that all the pain took on meaning for me. It had passed but the beauty it brought has remained."

This is the message of all the scripture: ***"Like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand."***

This too is the message of scripture.

During the days of Jesus' life, He offered up prayers and petitions to God with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and He was heard because of his reverent submission.

Although He was a son, He learned obedience from what He suffered, and once made perfect He became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey Him.

We killed the author of life, but God raised Him from the dead. This is how God fulfilled what He had foretold through all the prophets, saying that His Christ would suffer. Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out and that times of

refreshing may come from the Lord.

We are now children of God. What we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when He appears, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. Everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.

Jesus waited before he opened the minds of His disciples because He could do no other. The story was not complete until His resurrection occurred.

The disciples could not understand the scriptures until they witnessed the fact that He rose from the dead.

We too, like the first disciples cannot understand the scriptures until our minds have been opened by our experience with Him, and by our faith in His resurrection.

Without believing in Jesus and the fact that He both died and rose for us we are like the people who studied the Amazon. We can know a lot about Him, but never understand Him or experience all that He has in store for us.

But with Him, believing in Him, even if we cannot read the holy book, even if we cannot study the sacred page, we can understand what God has said there on those pages.

There is a story told about a recent convert to the Christian faith who was asked by one of his unbelieving friends about Jesus.

The friend said to him: "I hear you have become a Christian." "Yes", said the convert.

"Then you must know a great deal about Christ", said the friend. "Tell me, what country was He born in?"

"I don't know", replied the convert.

"Well then, what was His age when He died?" asked the friend.

"I don't know" replied the convert.

"Well, can you tell me how many sermons He preached? Or how He was born, or how He did miracles, or how He was raised from the dead?" asked the friend.

"I don't know" responded the convert.

"You certainly know very little for a man who claims to be a Christian" said the friend.

"You are right," replied the convert, "I am ashamed of how little I know. But this much I do know. Three years ago, I was a drunkard. I was in debt. My family was falling to pieces. My wife and children would dread my return home each evening. I was desperate. I gave my heart to God. Now I have given up booze, we are out of debt, and my wife and I are in love once more. All this Christ has done for me. This much I know.

We can know the biography of Jesus that is found in the scriptures.

We can explore the laws that are written down and debate the reasons for why this or that happened.

We can gain all kinds of knowledge about scripture, but none of it will give us the understanding that God wants us to have.

If we would understand what the scriptures are really all about, then we must not only open them, but we must also allow Jesus to open our minds by placing our trust in Him, in the one to whom the scriptures point.

Then, like the explorer of the Amazon, like the clay in the hands of the potter, like the convert to the faith whose life changed, we will truly understand, and we will praise God for it, and for the life He has given us.

AMEN

Let us pray

Lord Jesus Christ, the light of Your love shines on, illuminating the places where You are present. As the bewildered disciples pondered the stories of Your appearance, You penetrated the darkness of their fear and doubt with Your word of peace. You showed them the appalling marks of evil pierced on Your hands and feet. You opened their minds to understand why You had to die to defeat such evil and death. Increase our understanding, we pray, and open our minds and hearts to receive you.

Bring to us O God, the sense of Your living presence as we go into this new week. Renew in us the faith You want us to have, the faith that is not afraid to reach out in Your name and to share the treasure You have given us. That treasure which is greater than silver and gold.

Finally, O Lord, we ask that You would bless us at here at Knox with vision for the future and reverence for the past. Guide us each day as we minister to one another and to world for which you gave yourself. Help us each day to bear witness to your name and to do that which you would have us do. We ask it through Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen

BENEDICTION

Go in peace, love and care for one another in the name of Christ and may you be blessed by the awareness of God's continual presence and Power.

May your path each day be lit by God's all surrounding and indwelling Spirit, and may the joy and the love and the wisdom of the Risen and living Christ fill your hearts, both now and forevermore. ***Amen***