

“Keep an Open Mind”

Luke 24:44-53

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

A common phrase when people want to suggest something new or untested and bring a fresh perspective to things is, “Keep an open mind.” When the majority of people use this phrase, it’s because they are going so far outside the box, that it requires some malleability in one’s thinking in order to get behind it. Sometimes an open mind can be a very good and necessary thing. If you’ve been beating your head against a wall trying to figure out how to solve a problem, it might be a good idea to think outside the box. After all, if you really try hard enough, you can get that square peg into that round hole. There’s always a solution, even if that solution is just to beat it with a hammer until it goes through. But there are also dangers in an open mind. There certainly are places and times where an open mind should be shut, and encouraged to stay quiet.

In our text this morning, as we observe the festival of the Ascension of our Lord, Jesus opens the minds of His Apostles to understand the Scriptures. They don’t need to “keep an open mind” because, by nature, their minds are closed. Their sinful natures blind them to the truth that was revealed in the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms, and even though they spent 3 years learning from Jesus, they still did not fully understand. You cannot reason your way to understanding the Scriptures. The sinful flesh stands in your way, and it will work to take you on detour after detour and point in every direction but the one that points to Jesus. And the risen and now ascended Lord knows that to be true, so He breaks down that barrier and opens the minds of the Twelve to the truth of His fulfillment of all they were told.

You and the Apostles are no different from one another in that regard. Your sinful nature is constantly working against you, leading you down paths of death and destruction whenever it has the opportunity. It wants you to go “outside the box” in your thinking and use your logic and reason before you use the knowledge you have according to faith. And the flesh is all too willing to give into those temptations. You see it everywhere in the world as sin takes over the lives of humanity. Murder, crime, deceit, genocide, and so much more are rampant throughout a society that claims to be peaceful and loving. But they have no concept of what love truly is, because without a heart that is opened by the gift of the Spirit, their minds remain closed to the love of God in Christ Jesus, and there is no true love beyond that.

That is the problem rampant in the so-called Christian church in the world. The place where Christ should be central to everything has all but abandoned His love as it is understood in Scripture. Jesus did not ascend to the right hand of His Father so that His bride could run wild in the world, finally free of the tyranny of her Bridegroom. But that is what she has done. Heretical organizations have begotten heretical churches that treat the doctrines of the Lord like a disposable plastic cup. They drink from it once and decide they don't like it, so they throw the whole thing away and start over with a new one. The church doesn't get to determine the doctrines of God. Those doctrines are revealed to us in His Holy Word, and Scripture alone is the judge of right and wrong. As the Apostle Paul says in Romans 8:7, "The mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's Law; indeed, it cannot."

The "open mind" that exists in the false churches around the world is not one that is opened by the work of the Holy Spirit. It is one that is set on the things of the flesh. Their minds seek pleasure and personal joy where there should be piety and sincerity. The orthodox worship of the Lutheran Church (in the proper sense) is built around the Word of the Lord. In the liturgy, you say back to the Lord that which He has already said to you, not "praise songs" and a rock-n-roll jam session just for Jesus. Open minds that are open to the things of the world making their way into the church breed nothing but false theology and people who have a fragile faith built on themselves and not upon Christ. As Paul says in our Epistle lesson, "He put all things under His feet and gave Him as head over all things to the Church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all." He is the head of the Church. You worship at His good pleasure, receiving His gifts not because you gave enough to Him, but because He loves you and knows you have nothing to give that merits such love.

That is the treasure of the Christian. Your mind is open to the truth of your salvation in Christ Jesus, the one who has been taken up into heaven by His Father, who died to redeem the world and make you righteous in His sight. It is not for you to stare into heaven, seeking to bring the Lord back by your own power and ability to praise Him with all your heart. Paul says in Romans 10:6, "Who will ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down)." He tells you by His Word that you are not to stand looking up into heaven. That is not the manner in which you are to worship your Lord Jesus. You look forward to the truth that Jesus will come again in the same way He was taken up. When the Lord of all things returns on the clouds of heaven the same as those clouds took Him up into heaven, the fulfillment of the worship life of the Church will be complete. Everything that is done in the liturgy points to the truth of Christ and Him crucified,

risen, and ascended, and that He will indeed come again to inaugurate a perfect peace in the new heaven and the new earth.

As you look forward to Pentecost next week, where the Lord gives the Holy Spirit in His fullness to the Apostles—to His Church—it is good and right that the discussion of the Ascension brings to light the work of the Church. The Church is called to preach the Gospel in its truth and purity. It is called to rightly administer the Holy Sacraments as they are instituted by Christ Himself. There isn't any rocket science to it. There isn't a level of innovation that must be reached in order for the Church to prosper in this world. Prosperity and the Church are not bedfellows, but enemies. The Church goes forth as the Lord sees fit, according to His divine plan and His will alone.

But He doesn't do this mysteriously and through some work of secret revelation or ecstatic outbursts. He does it through Word and Sacrament ministry. He does it by protecting His bride—the Church—in His sending of faithful men to guard and protect her by His Word. Those who have gone astray and abided in false doctrines have abandoned the call of Christ to hold His people in the one true faith. False teachers abound in the world, and only through proper instruction in the Word can that be overcome. It is a destructive reality that the Church will battle until the day that Christ comes again. Peter says in 2 Peter 2:1 that false teachers will arise among you, and will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master that bought them. You must be on guard for the evil one's attempts to bring these things into the Lord's Church. He seeks the corruption of Christ's bride and will do it from within by misleading and alluring you with the sweet honey of destruction.

Yet, the truth remains strong in His Word. If you hold fast to His Word, having your minds kept open by the Spirit of truth, you will have all the strength you need to battle such falsity. God Himself has given you His only Son, that you might have the necessary weapons to battle the devil and his lies. Through the Law you have been slain, brought to the nothingness that you truly are before the Lord in your sinful flesh as a poor, miserable sinner. And you have been saved by the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Gospel of Christ and Him crucified, risen, and ascended on high. Your lack of worthiness has been negated by Christ's worthiness. Jesus' blood has cleansed you from all unrighteousness, forgiven you of all your sins that would otherwise condemn you and leave you despairing.

And you will shortly come forward to receive the greatest treasure He has given His Church in the Holy Supper of His very body and blood. He is present here for you, to bring you forgiveness, life, and salvation by His blood, which He has done in such a

concrete way that you can touch, taste, and feel it. Lutherans are often accused of lacking emotion and feeling in our services, but what joy there is in such a proclamation that you are forgiven of your sins for the sake of the one who has given His own life for you—who has bled and died and given you the foretaste of the feast to come in the presence of His banquet hall. There you will join the heavenly host who partake of His body and blood in a way we will never understand on this side of heaven. But until then, we share in His meal from this side, as the curtain is torn, heaven is opened and we are brought into fellowship with the entire host of saints in the reception of this glorious meal.

So, as they say, “Keep an open mind.” But not open to the world and its misguided ideals. Remain in the Word, because it is there that the Holy Spirit will keep your mind open to the truth of your salvation in Jesus Christ. Remain present to receive His gifts of forgiveness by His blood in His Holy Supper to dwell in communion with your Lord Jesus and all the saints. Your mind is opened to the reality that this is not the end. Your Lord, Jesus, has ascended to His Father’s right hand, to rule from His heavenly throne for the benefit of your everlasting soul, and you only know that because of the revelation of His Holy Word, which you believe by faith alone. Because He has risen and ascended and now dwells in the house of His Father, you too will rise to dwell with your Heavenly Father, forever in the presence of the glory of God. By His gift of salvation, imparted to you by faith, you will be taken up into the new heaven and the new earth, partaking in everlasting life among the blessed saints and angels for all eternity. Amen.