

Eyes to See Sermon Series
“Then Their Eyes Were Opened”
Luke 24:13-35
April 23, 2023
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As we continue in the Easter season, we are beginning a sermon series today called *Eyes to See*. I’m remembering that at the start of his sermon last week Brian commented on the fact that he is being forced to accept that he doesn’t have the eyes to see 14-point font anymore without his reading glasses. I laughed to myself and thought, *I’m way ahead of you, Brian. I may be younger than you, but I’ve been using 16-point font for 3 years already!* Aging eyes have a hard time seeing and glasses can help with that, but reading glasses or corrective lenses don’t help us much when we look around and try to see Jesus. We believe that he is alive – that is the good news that we proclaim and celebrate during this Easter season - but we can’t see him with our physical eyes. No pair of eyeglasses can change that. This makes having a relationship with Jesus different than other relationships that we have. It’s mysterious and you might have moments every now and then when you wonder if someone is really there or if you’re just talking to yourself. Last week we heard about Thomas who felt that he needed to see Jesus physically before he could believe, and we can relate to that. If we had the chance, most of us would want to see Jesus in the flesh- now, sooner than later- but at the end of that story after Jesus appeared to Thomas he said, “blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.” That statement points to the truth that we can know and have a real relationship with Jesus even if he is physically invisible to us. We can even see him, but we see him in a different way - not with physical eyes but with spiritual eyes. Our Easter season sermon series is called *Eyes to See* because for the next few weeks we’re going to be talking about having a relationship with a risen Lord and Savior that we don’t see in the same way that the disciples saw him before his death, and resurrection, and ascension.

After Jesus rose from the dead, there were people who saw him and became eyewitnesses to his resurrection and the Gospels tell us about those encounters. One of those stories is the one we heard last week about Jesus’s appearance to the disciples and then to then to Thomas. That story is only found in John’s Gospel and this morning we’re looking at another eyewitness story that is only told in Luke.

Luke 24 begins at the tomb where the women find it empty and see an angel who tells them that Jesus is risen just like he said he would. The women go back to the other disciples and tell them what they’ve seen and heard, and Luke says the disciples didn’t believe the women. Only Peter was curious enough to go to the tomb himself and check it out. After that, Luke tells about two of Jesus’s disciples who were walking together later that same day. They were part of the group who heard the women’s report about the empty tomb, and though they had heard the testimony, they struggled to believe it was true. When the women told the disciples about it, Luke says they thought the women were talking nonsense. Let’s listen to the story that Luke tells in Luke 24 beginning at verse 13.

Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. ¹⁴They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. ¹⁵As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; ¹⁶but they were kept from recognizing him.

¹⁷He asked them, “What are you discussing together as you walk along?” They stood still, their faces downcast. ¹⁸One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, “Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?” ⁹“What things?” he asked. “About Jesus of Nazareth,” they replied. “He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. ²⁰The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; ²¹but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. ²²In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the

tomb early this morning²³ but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. ²⁴Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see Jesus." ²⁵He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! ²⁶Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" ²⁷And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself. ²⁸As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus continued on as if he were going farther. ²⁹But they urged him strongly, "Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over." So he went in to stay with them. ³⁰When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. ³¹Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. ³²They asked each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?" ³³They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together ³⁴and 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.

The risen Jesus himself came up and joined the disciples while they were walking, but they didn't realize it was him. The text actually says that *they were kept from* recognizing him. It's a passive verb phrase, a Divine passive, which means that we are to understand that it was God who kept them from recognizing Jesus. When you see a Divine passive like this in Scripture, and there are other places where they come up, it tends to beg the question, "why?" Why would God keep them from recognizing Jesus right off the bat? What would be the reason for holding out on these poor grieving and confused disciples? I can't answer for God, but I will venture a guess as to why they were kept from recognizing Jesus right away.

My guess is that Jesus was not revealed to them immediately because the time had come to learn how to see and perceive Jesus in a different way. They had gotten to know Jesus in the same way that we get to know anyone – by spending time in his presence- riding in boats with him, walking beside him, eating at tables with him, and having conversations with him. Now they were going to have to get used to having a relationship with Jesus in the same way that you and I do -without being able to see him with their eyes or touch him with their hands. That was going to be completely new, and they didn't know yet how something like that would work exactly. Before his death, Jesus had talked to them and told them that this day was coming. In John 14:18-19 he had said to them, "I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me." The disciples had struggled to understand what Jesus was saying to them on that night, and they didn't understand any better at this point as they were walking on the road to Emmaus. How would they see without seeing? Without realizing what was happening, Jesus began to show them.

Jesus asked them what they were talking about, and they recounted the events of the last few days saying they had hoped that Jesus had been the Messiah but that didn't appear to be true at this point. When Jesus heard this, he recalled the words of Scripture and then he led them in a Bible study. In that Bible study he showed them place after place where he could be found. They still didn't see that the man speaking to them was Jesus, but they were beginning to learn that they could see Jesus in and through the words of Scripture. It was like a pair of glasses they could put on for their spiritual eyes. That was lesson one.

After the Bible study, Jesus who they still only knew as a stranger began to go on his way, but the two disciples offered hospitality to the stranger. Showing hospitality to others, even strangers, was an important part of the Jewish tradition. It was a tradition rooted in Ancient Near Eastern cultural practices, but for the Jews it was also a practice with biblical roots. They were instructed by the story of Abraham who hosted three strangers and found out later that they had been angels. The Jews recognized that in showing hospitality to others, even strangers, there was an opportunity to meet and receive God. In her

book *Soul Feast*, Marjorie Thompson says, “Hospitality in biblical times was understood to be a way of meeting and receiving holy presence. Although providing hospitality was risky, it was a risk taken in faith. After all, the stranger just might be an angel- a messenger of God!”¹

When Jesus was teaching the disciples, he had also instructed them about showing hospitality and he made this very point. He told a story about a King coming and he separates the sheep and the goats based on whether they did or didn’t show hospitality to others. The ones who receive the king’s welcome into the kingdom are the ones to whom he says, “for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.” When did we do this for you they asked, and he tells them, “just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me” (Matthew 25:34-40).

When the two disciples invited this stranger on the road to stay with them, they were obedient and faithful to the teachings they had received about showing hospitality to strangers, and this was lesson two. They were about to understand from their own experience that Jesus could be seen and found in the people and the strangers that they encountered as they went about their daily lives.

Jesus accepted their invitation to stay with them and it was during the meal that they shared that they recognized Jesus. Jesus took bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to them, and then *their eyes were opened*. Their eyes were opened is another divine passive phrase so again we can understand that it was God who opened their eyes and enabled them at that moment to recognize that it was Jesus who had been with them all along. This was the third lesson. Going forward, they would be able to “see” Jesus, real and present with them, when they accepted his invitation to eat bread and drink from the cup together, doing it in obedience to and remembrance of him.

These three lessons were very practical for the two disciples who met Jesus on the road to Emmaus and they are practical for us. We’ve already said, and we probably know from our own experience, that it can sometimes feel that Jesus is far away somewhere and absent from our daily experience, and we aren’t sure where to look or how to find him. Those times can feel like it felt yesterday for Brian and me and our confirmation class looking for something that we didn’t know how to find. Yesterday Brian and I spent the day with our Confirmation class taking them around town doing activities and teaching along the way. We went to an escape room, and we had one hour to find the clues and ultimately the key to the boat that we could use to escape the island before the volcano exploded and killed us all. There must be a resurrection because we didn’t make it off the island, yet here we are today. If you’ve never done an escape room, you start out with nothing. You’re just in a room, and you have to look around for the first clue and one clue leads to another. Finding the clues in an escape room can be hard, but Jesus doesn’t want us to feel like it’s hard to find him which is why he showed the disciples and why he shows us where to look.

If we find ourselves feeling like the disciples on the road to Emmaus- doubting that what we have believed about Jesus is true or feeling that we’ve been left all along- Jesus has told us what to do. First, go to Scripture. Read the Bible on your own. If you don’t understand it, read it in a group with others, or listen to a podcast, or ask your pastor, or look for another teacher who can help you. When we read Scripture and study it, the Holy Spirit is present, and the Holy Spirit opens our spiritual eyes so that we can see and find Jesus in Scripture.

If you want to see Jesus when you’re at work, or walking in your neighborhood, or at the grocery store, look at the people around you. Pay attention especially to the ones who look or seem different. Make eye contact. Smile. Even those small things are a way of showing hospitality, but there are bigger things we can do to. Offer food and drink to someone. Instead of keeping to yourself, take a welcome-to-

¹ Thompson, Marjorie. *Soul Feast: An Invitation to the Christian Spiritual Life*, 2005, WJK Press: Louisville, KY. p.127.

the-neighborhood basket to your new neighbors who have a different cultural background than you do. Listen to others when they speak and let them know that you've heard them. These are ways to show welcome and hospitality to others, and when we do, it becomes possible to see Jesus right there with us.

Devote yourself to the breaking of bread. We also talked about this with the Confirmation class yesterday. We finished up at Panera and sat around a table and shared some bread and talked about being devoted to regularly sharing in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. We don't just eat bread and drink juice together once a month because it's a nice tradition. We do it because the risen, living Jesus invites us and welcomes us to his table and he is present with us there – invisible to our natural eyes, but as real and as really there as the bread and juice that we touch, and taste, and feel. He is revealed to us in the breaking of bread just like he was revealed to the disciples in our story.

Reading Scripture, welcoming strangers, and participating in the Lord's Supper are all things that we can do, and just as God was active in the story we've heard today – keeping the disciples from seeing at first and then opening their eyes- the Holy Spirit is active in our lives when we do these things to open our eyes and enable us to see Jesus, too. Jesus isn't hiding from us. He has given us the clues and shown us where to look. He can be seen, if we look. Amen.