

Ascension Sunday

Acts 1:1–11

Ephesians 1:15–23

Luke 24:44–53

Opened Minds

Jesus scares his disciples today. Apparently, while they're all gathered to hear about Peter seeing Christ on the road to Emmaus, Jesus just appears in their midst and says, "Peace be with you." Naturally, the disciples immediately start freaking out, because their dead teacher just popped up in the middle of their group. While they're freaking out, Jesus has to prove it's really him, so he shows the disciples his hands and his feet. They're still freaking out, so he even eats some fish in front of them to prove that he's not a ghost. It's a funny picture, because they're so taken aback. They couldn't believe that actually he did what he said he was going to do.



Eventually, they settle down, and Jesus talks to them. He starts off by saying, "I told you so – these are my words that I spoke to

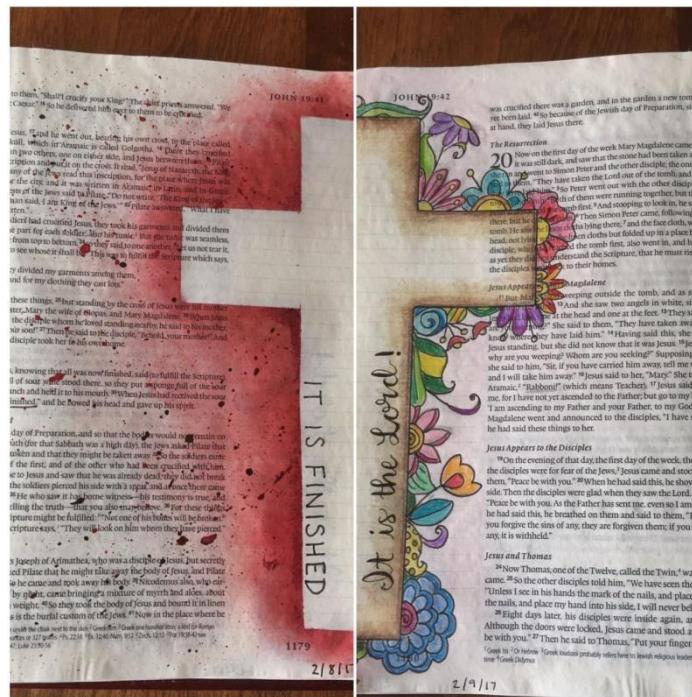
you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." And he opens their minds to understand the Scriptures. Suddenly, they can look at the account of God and His people, and they *get it*. It's all about Jesus.



Every day it seems I hear new theories about what's going on with the Coronavirus. Is this really all an accident, or is it a political tool? Is it an international conspiracy to disrupt America's power? Is it divine punishment from God? Are we taking it too seriously? Are we taking it seriously enough? And most importantly: when will God permit Pastor David to finally get a haircut? Maybe that last one's just my wife's cross to bear. In the face of these questions, I ask you: if you knew the answer to any of those things, what would that change about today? Would it impact your relationship with your Heavenly Father in any meaningful way? So why are you chasing after this as if

everything depended on it? It's a time to wait and trust: God is at work right now, even if it's not obvious.

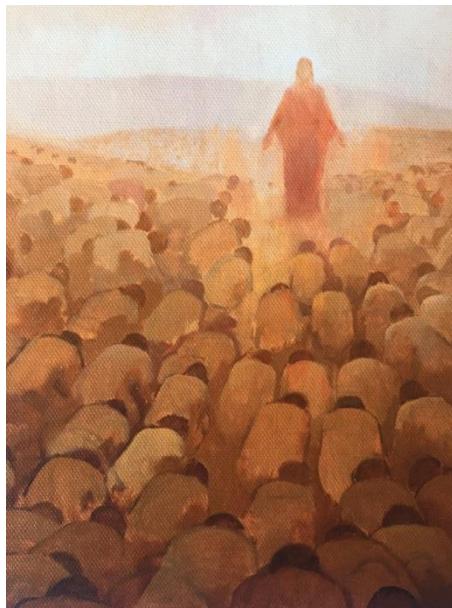
It wasn't obvious to the disciples that God was up to something special in the Scriptures. Jesus helps them understand – it says that “He opened their minds.” The word used for “open” here is a powerful verb in Greek – it means their minds were opened “all the way up.” The word can also be used for mothers giving birth, blind eyes being healed, or deaf ears being opened.



The disciples' minds were opened all the way up, and then they could understand: everything written in the Old Testament – the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms – was about the Son of God and what he was coming to do. The disciples, caught up in their despair, confusion, and panic, couldn't see how the promises of God applied to their lives right then until Jesus opened their minds and made the connections they couldn't.

As I see our social media feeds and have conversations with you, I sense that we have been slow to listen, and quick to speak to what we don't really know. We are looking for connections we can't really make because that helps us feel in control.

One day we will safely gather again. When we look back at these days, we will have more answers: some of them will satisfy, and some will not; some answers will never come to light.



Let's ask questions we can answer: Can Jesus be King if this is all a conspiracy? Can Jesus be King if the virus becomes more deadly? Can Jesus be King if this is all much ado about nothing? Do not let your hearts be troubled – you know the answer.

You know the answer because all Christians have been given an **opened mind**. We know the truth about the Messiah – who he is and what he's accomplished. I'm not telling you anything new, but it goes even deeper than that, because saving faith isn't just believing that God exists – it's actively trusting in God's promises and in the One whom God sent to us.

When the disciples finally understood the Scriptures, it wasn't just about looking back. They also looked ahead, and understood that they had God's work to do. Not only did Jesus die and rise, but Jesus tells them that people need to hear about it – that the forgiveness of sins must be proclaimed by His witnesses to all nations. That is always the church's job, your job and mine: to proclaim Christ crucified for the forgiveness of sins, even when we're not sure what's going to happen next.



I can't read the whole thing for you here, but when we're done – or if you want to pause right now – take a look at Isaiah 55. The whole passage is a beautiful account of how we so often waste our efforts on what doesn't feed us, and how God invites us to eat what is good and hear his Word so we may live. It calls us to seek the Lord. We're reminded that God is God and we are not. Isaiah also tells us about the day that's coming, when the hills and the mountains will burst into song, and the trees will clap their hands. All of creation, opened all the way up to receive its King. Even in these strange days, remember: it's still all about Jesus.



When Jesus ascends, Luke doesn't roll the credits and say thanks for watching. He tells it this way:

“Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them. While he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven. And they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple blessing God.”

From that time on, the apostles and those who trusted God's promises did life: relying on Jesus, proclaiming the forgiveness of sins, and waiting for his return.

God bless you with peace in these times, as we wait for Jesus to come back in the same way as he left: with our minds opened, and our hearts washed clean.

Amen.