

3 Easter Year B

4/18/2021

Acts 3:12-19; Psalm 4; 1 John 3:1-7; Luke 24:36b-48

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As I meditated this week on our readings and opening collect...

Our prayer for today...

I was so struck by the words of our prayer.

Let me prayerfully read the words again:

O God, whose blessed Son made himself known to his disciples in the breaking of bread: Open the eyes of our faith, that we may behold him in all his redeeming work; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

The line that we pray: *Open the eyes of our faith, that we may behold him in all his redeeming work...*

That line stirred in my mind and heart all week.

Open the eyes of our faith...

When I hear the expression *Open the eyes...*

I tend to think when someone is upset and trying to get someone to realize something.

Open your eyes!

What are you doing?

Open your eyes.

Yesterday, I had the privilege of spending the day with a few of our parishioners as they prepare to be confirmed and received into the Episcopal Church the next time Bishop Greg visits with us.

It is a long day...

So, I went home and had some downtime...

and watched the New York Mets.

And every once in a while, if the umpire made a bad call I wanted to blurt out: *Open your eyes... ump!*

That is what I hear in this prayer...

Except that we are praying it for own eyes to be opened...

Open the eyes of our faith...

Our belief...

Let us truly see and understand so that we may behold Jesus in all his redeeming work.

And of course, that is a huge statement.

Not just his salvation for me...

Not just his redemption of my own life...

But so that we may behold him in ALL his redeeming work.
As Jesus came to die on the cross for all of his creation.

Our prayer says Open our eyes of faith... so that we may behold how
Jesus is redeeming all things!

Talk about perspective...

It's a game changing...

life changing...

perspective.

And that is my approach this season of Easter...

I am reading our readings and prayers through this question:

What does the resurrected life look like?

We are on the New Testament...

the new covenant...

side of the cross and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

How does his resurrection...

and our future resurrection as His disciples...

impact the way that we live in the here and now?

What does the resurrected life look like?

And I was struck by our readings from Acts and the Gospel of Luke.

It was St. Peter in our first reading from Acts who said:

Now, fellow Israelites, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders. But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Messiah would suffer.

And then St. Peter says:

Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out

Notice he doesn't say love and accept everyone and be kind.

He actually preached the suffering of our Savior and repentance.

Turning from sin.

Why would he do that.

My guess is because that is what Jesus told him to do.

And we find when Jesus told him to do that in our Gospel reading.

Jesus said:

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

You are witnesses of these things.

Jesus told his disciples to go and tell people to repent.

And so his disciples went out and told the people to repent.

And that is what we are called to do as followers of Jesus Christ as well.

Former Bishop of the Diocese of Georgia, Scott Anson Benhase wrote this experience on his social media feed this week.

He said:

Years ago when I was recruiting at one of our seminaries, I ended each interview by doing a role-play with them. I'd play who I was (minus being a bishop), a 50-something, over-educated, occasionally-pissant, straight white male. I asked each seminarian to tell me why I should join their church.

They all mentioned community. I said I attended AA. I had all the needed support.

They mentioned outreach opportunities. I replied I was an active member of Rotary. I was already fully involved in helping needy folk.

Lastly, they mentioned the glorious music program at their church. I responded I had season tickets to the local symphony. I already enjoyed plenty of great music.

I waited patiently for some mention of how their church could meet my greatest need, namely, to be reconciled with God through Jesus by his cross. Bishop Scott says it Never came.

He went on to write in the same post:

Parish clergy aren't social directors, community service providers, or music [entertainers]. We got one thing and one thing only: God's grace in Jesus. We're stewards of the Great Narrative of Redemption.

I think he is spot on with his points here.

I would suggest that all believers are stewards of the great narrative of redemption.

Clergy or not...

we are called to proclaim God's salvation through the cross of Jesus Christ.

In the church...

No, not the building...

The church... the people of God...

We hold the greatest need in all the world...

For sinners to become reconciled with God through the ministry of Jesus Christ on the cross.

It is the “*why*” of our existence as a church.

We are called to proclaim the goodness of Jesus on the cross so that people will become reconciled with God through the grace of our Lord Jesus by the witness of the Holy Spirit.

We enjoy good music...

Good liturgy...

Good worship...

Good community...

Supporting and helping those in need.

But the greatest thing the church will ever have is Jesus Christ and the grace we receive because of his suffering and death on the cross.

Without it...

We are no more than a country club or a charity.

And this message of God’s grace through the suffering of Jesus is what we proclaim, and it is what transforms us too.

It is how we are to live.

It is good news for us too.

Life changing belief.

Pastor Kenneth Tanner recently wrote:

I am astounded by a God who has wounds to show us.

The same God who we proclaim...

Is the same God who shows his followers the scars in his hands...

he has wounds to show us.

He knows us...

He knows the pain and the difficulties that we have in our own lives...

And the answer for us is the same answer as the one we proclaim to the world around us...

God is a redeeming God...

He loves us so much that He sent Jesus into the world to save people from sin and death by the atonement on the cross.

He rose from the grave...

He rose victoriously from the grave...

And he has invited us to receive forgiveness by his grace...

And to walk in newness of life...

So that we can walk with the Spirit of God in our lives...

So that we can be healed in body, soul, and mind...

So that we can live free from the bondage of sin...

And we can live in the hope that God is coming back again to set the world at rights.

That is the power of living in the resurrected life.

We can choose to live in the power of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Or we can go about living our life like our dog just died.

Or that nothing ever works out.

I choose not to live like that.

Yes, there are troubles in this world.

Jesus promised that.

We should not be surprised.

But when we live in the truth of Jesus Christ crucified...

When we live in the truth of Jesus Christ resurrected...

When we live in the truth of Jesus... who is coming back again...

Our world is flipped upside down...

And we become not bystanders...

but ministers of the good news of Jesus Christ.

We become people who believe that when we pray for healing...
God will heal the hurting, the broken, and the sick.

We become people who proclaim to a world so entrapped by fear...
that God loves you and holds you in the palm of his hand.

We become people that proclaim that we can be free from sin and
death... because of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross.

So back to our collect...

Our opening prayer.

Today we prayed...

*Open the eyes of our faith, so that we may behold him in all his
redeeming work.*

Yes.

That is our prayer.

Open our eyes God...

To what you are doing in this world...

To what you are redeeming in this world...

Open the eyes of our faith...

Amen.