

“As they were talking about these things, Jesus himself stood among them, and said to them, “Peace to you!” But they were startled and frightened and thought they saw a spirit. And he said to them, “Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.” And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. And while they still disbelieved for joy and were marveling, he said to them, “Have you anything here to eat?” They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate before them. Then he said to them, “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.” Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.”

Dear Friends in Christ, and fellow redeemed:

Well, it happened to me again the other day. I was having a conversation with someone who isn't a Christian and they said, “well, you're not very open-minded, are you?” That may not come as a surprise to many of you. I am sure that my wife and my children would agree with that assessment. I won't deny that there are many ways in which I am not the most open-minded person in the world. I am stubborn and set in my ways. I know what I believe and will not be easily persuaded from it. I am wary toward, and discerning of, the many ideas, teachings and beliefs of a world that is closed to the wisdom of God.

Yet I do think of myself as open-minded. I am willing to learn and willing to try new things. I was one of the first pastors to embrace computers and their use in the church, at a time when many thought that they had little to offer the church. I still like to see how new technology can be used to bring the unchanging Gospel to our changing world. I try very hard not to judge someone in a conversation and am open to the things they have to say, even if I will not buy into the truth of everything, especially if it is contrary to God's Word. When my children wanted to do something I wasn't comfortable with, I would tell them, “Convince me. State your case, and I will listen openly and fairly, although I may still disagree with you.

In the eyes of most people in this world, being open-minded means accepting and tolerating every idea, whim and desire of others. We think of open-minded people as being free from judgmental attitudes or preconceived prejudice. What many do not understand is that it is possible to have strong beliefs and convictions and still be open-minded.

As God's people we know that there are ways that we cannot always be open-minded. While there are those even within the church who believe that the church must adopt more progressive stances when it comes to sexual morality and other cultural war issues, St. Paul tells us, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit: *I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.* (Romans 12:1-2 - ESV) Yes, this is one place where I will not be the least bit open-minded. If God has said something, I believe it is true and I am bound to it. It is not open for debate. It is not open to question. We haven't somehow advanced beyond God's truth. God's Word is the standard, the measure and the only source of our teaching and doctrine.

And yet, it is with the Word itself that we are to be open-minded Christians. That doesn't mean that we blindly or carelessly accept every teaching we hear, just because it comes from someone who claims to be Christian. As St. Paul also said: *But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God. And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled only to those who are perishing. In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.* (2 Corinthians 4:2-6 - ESV)

It is in that light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ that we become open-minded Christians. In our text, Luke takes us back to that first Easter evening. What a day that had been! Jesus had appeared to Mary Magdalene, and then to the women who had come to the tomb, and then to Simon Peter. Luke also records the witness of two followers of Jesus who had a unique experience on the road to Emmaus. As they journeyed home, Jesus appeared to them, although they didn't recognize Him. We are told that Jesus opened the minds of those two men who were feeling despondent and defeated. He says: ***“O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?” And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.*** (Luke 24:25–27, ESV)

We see Jesus repeat this bible study with the disciples. ***“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.” Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.”***

Like the disciples we go to the Scriptures to see that they testify of Christ and all He has done for us. In and through that Word of Truth—God's Word—the Spirit opens our minds, too. We don't need the endless stream of useless, meaningless and misleading information that we often hear from the world. We aren't open-minded just because we accept every teaching, philosophy and idea of men. What the world sees as open-mindedness so often causes confusion, fear and doubt. Without the truth of the Scriptures, we are told that even the disciples were startled and frightened. But when the Holy Spirit opens our minds and our hearts to the wonders of real truth; absolute truth; living truth we have the very promise that Jesus brought to His disciples that night in that locked room—the promise of peace.

We have that peace, for the Holy Spirit continues to open our minds to the wonders of God's love and grace for us. John said in our Epistle lesson: ***“See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are”*** (1 John 3:1, ESV) When we are honest with ourselves we see that we don't deserve even the least place in God's family. We have sinned by our disobedience to His law. John tells us: ***“Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. You know that he appeared in order to take away sins, and in him there is no sin.”*** (1 John 3:4–5, ESV) The Spirit of grace and truth opens our minds through the Scriptures to know this greatest and most glorious of truths: ***“Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.***

Open minded Christians are those whose minds have been opened by the Holy Spirit to know the truth of the Saviour who dies, but also the truth of that Saviour who rises from the dead, never to die again. In our office devotions, we often pray for youth and young adults, especially in their studies. We pray that they may grow in the good and beneficial wisdom of the world. Yes, there are blessings in worldly wisdom. We see God blessing us through the knowledge of medicine and technology. We can thank Him for the means of communication that allow us to bring His Word to our members and even to the world in the midst of these COVID days. Yet when we pray for students and their learning, we pray that they may be discerning so that they open to learning those things that are beneficial, while we pray that they will not be misled by any teaching that would keep their hearts closed to the one wisdom and truth that is above all things. We pray that we may all be open-minded through God's Word, seeing what Christ has done for us, or, as St. Paul says: ***“that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.”*** (Philippians 3:10–11, ESV)

God the Holy Spirit has opened our minds and our hearts to see the dying and rising Christ in the Word that God has given to us. He opens our minds to a mystery beyond understanding, as He shows us the real presence of Christ in the bread and wine of Holy Communion. With open minds and open hearts, we rejoice in the Saviour who died and rose for us. Our sins are forgiven through the One who died in our place. Heaven is open to us through the living Saviour, who destroyed sin, death and hell. And what a joy it is to continue to live as open-minded Christians, seeing the Christ whose love, mercy and grace resonates in every page of God's Word. Amen.