

Jeff's reflection – April 18, 2021

If we were asked to name commandments found in the Bible, many of us would start by trying to remember the Ten Commandments.

But there are other commandments in the Bible. When Jesus was asked to state the first, the most important commandment, he replied, "The greatest commandment is to love God with all your heart, soul and mind...and there is a second commandment that is like the first, that you love your neighbour as yourself."

In John's Gospel, Jesus says "A new commandment I give you, that you love one another, as I have loved you."

Then, in today's reading from the gospel of Luke, the resurrected Jesus gives his friends yet another commandment, a rather brief one. This commandment is "Open Up!"

Okay, Jesus doesn't actually say that, but it's what he teaches them. We read that "he opened their minds to understand the scriptures."

He opened their minds. Open Up!

We open things all the time
-a window to let in some 'fresh' air.
-a book to begin to read.
-a drawer to find something

We open things that are closed, shut or sealed. We open, allowing connection between what is inside and what is outside.

The resurrected Jesus wanted to open the minds of his disciples.

Today's reading comes just after the story of two disciples heading to the village of Emmaus, getting out of Jerusalem after Jesus' crucifixion, perhaps fearful that the Roman military would begin rounding up Jesus' followers.

On the way, they are joined by a stranger. They tell the stranger about what has happened, and the stranger begins to talk about the Jewish scriptures – about Moses leading people out of slavery, about prophets who spoke of suffering for love rather than conquering for power.

The two disciples invite the stranger to share a meal with them. During the meal, as the stranger breaks a loaf of bread to share, they recognize the stranger as Jesus. As soon as they see who he is, he vanishes!

Those disciples head back to Jerusalem to tell the other disciples what had happened. It is during this conversation that we come to today's passage.

I know we don't usually associate humour with appearances of the resurrected Jesus, but if we visualize the beginning of this passage, we may chuckle.

The disciples are all talking when suddenly Jesus is just there, standing with them. They probably don't notice him until he says, "Peace be with you."

Which, of course, does anything but give them peace! Jesus, who is dead, is standing there! We are told that they are startled and terrified. They think they are seeing a ghost!! Peace be with you indeed!

The resurrected Jesus reassures them that he is, indeed, their Jesus. They touch him, they see the nail wounds in his hands and feet, and then, as they stand there unsure what to say or do, Jesus makes everything very familiar and homey by asking if they have anything to eat, and then eating a piece of broiled fish. I suspect Jesus may have been grinning throughout the whole encounter.

And then Jesus does something else that was familiar – he begins to teach them.

In the words of Luke, Jesus "opened their minds to understand the scriptures."

Their minds needed to be opened. Fear tends to close us up – close our minds, our enthusiasm, our hope.

Fear of others- fear because others look different, love differently, worship differently—closes minds to how God is active outside of our own experience, beliefs, culture or religion.

This passage may be describing a process the early church engaged in over a continuing period of time – going to their scriptures (what we refer to as the Hebrew Bible or the Old Testament) trying to locate Jesus within their existing faith story, to find references they could apply to Jesus, that would help make sense of a crucified Saviour.

Those scriptures, written over hundreds of years by a diverse collection of people with diverse contexts and experiences of God, contain a diversity of understandings and images of God.

I don't think any of the people who wrote any of the Hebrew scriptures did so thinking they were writing about a specific person named Jesus who would live and die at the hands of the Roman Empire hundreds of years after they wrote.

But, I think that the writers of the Hebrew scriptures were writing out of their experiences of the same God whom Jesus would experience.

The scriptures give us a diversity of witnesses saying "This is God's world! This is God's

creation! No matter what evidence may exist to the contrary – GOD EXISTS, GOD IS ACTIVE IN THE WORLD!

We read prophets saying God wants us to do justly, love mercy and walk humbly with God; prophets saying that God will raise up the hope in places of despair; that God judges societies by how the poorest, the most vulnerable, are treated; that in God's world all are included in a commonwealth of shared resources, mutual respect and profound love of the sacredness of everyone.

The resurrected Jesus tells his disciples to tell all nations, all societies – that repentance and forgiveness are the new normal.

This resurrected Jesus is opening minds to the existence of an alternative existence – one in which the poor, the peace-makers, the meek, the seekers of righteousness, are blessed, are carriers of the life-forming and transforming life of God.

Jesus is opening their minds – Jesus is opening our minds - to see that, because this is God's world, this is how things are supposed to be!

The writer and art collector, Gertrude Stein, once told the artist Pablo Picasso that he was ahead of his time, to which he replied, "No, I'm not ahead of my time, I'm with it. It is the others who are behind."

If we search our scriptures, we will discover Jesus opening our minds to be with this time, this time that is God's time, a time in which humans create communities of compassion and just relations.

During the Second World War, the citizens of Le Chambon, a small village in France, hid Jewish people in their homes to save them from being sent to Nazi death camps. After the war, a journalist interviewed the people of the village, asking them why they took such a big risk. The people seemed puzzled by the question. They tended to answer by shrugging and saying, "that is just what we do. It seemed to be right thing to do because that is who we are."

Resurrection is the life-giving presence of God in our world opening our minds, our hearts, to who we are as people of God's world – people who live the love of God experienced in this wounded and resurrected Jesus, a love that heals, forgives, resists violence, seeks peace and creates God's beloved community.

Jesus gives us another commandment – open up, to God's love creating us and creating God's world. Thanks be to God. Amen.

For reflection:

Think of a time your mind was opened to a new idea, a new perspective, a new way of seeing the world. What was that like? Was it exciting, anxiety-ridden, confusing?

This reflection suggests that the writers of the New Testament read the Hebrew scriptures looking to find Jesus in what they were reading. If we apply that practice in our own lives, where do you 'see' Jesus in our world, in something you have read or a movie you have seen?

If we trust that this is God's world, how does that influence the way we interact with the environment, with other people; the way social policies are made; the way we use our time, resources and money?