Sermon on Easter 3 Year B

There are certain things about which my mind is closed. I don’t believe that there’s anything anybody in this room could tell me that would make me believe that the Vancouver Canucks will ever win the Stanley Cup.

To be sure, I’ve got a closed mind about this based on no other evidence than anecdote and disappointment. In addition I’m not even interested in entertaining whether I should have an open mind about this question because a few years ago I made a deliberate decision to stop caring about most professional sports even though sports was important to me in my childhood and highschool years.

Of course, I’m not unique in this; indeed I’m sharing this particular example because it’s innocuous unless you’re trying to sell me Canuck’s tickets and because I’m sure that most of us have issues about which are minds are closed: which political party to vote for or whether cats or dogs rule!

There are many humorous and serious ways our this phenomena of the closed mind might work its way out in our lives; some of those ways keep us safe e.g. my mind is made up about what will happen to me if I stick a wet fork into an electrical outlet; I don’t have to keep thinking about it.

Some of them keep us insecure or afraid or unable to realize one of our capacities e.g. I think about how quite a few people have a closed mind about their self-worth, often aided by their parents or other authority figures who told them, repeatedly in many different ways that they weren’t worth much; so much so that now nobody can convince them otherwise; it’s hardwired into their self-perception.

And heartache in relationships is one of the results; failure in the work place is another.

Some of our close-minded tendencies lead to oppression whether that be racism or sexism or homophobia.

How we think about the world; what conclusions we’ve reached that cannot be shaken can have incalculable effects on ourselves, those around us and ultimately the wider community.

Enter our gospel reading. This is, in many ways, a repeat of last week’s gospel reading but now through Luke’s lens. The reading follows on from the famous Emmaus Road story which we read next year at this time where Jesus meets up with two sad folk heading back to their home village after the tragic events in Jerusalem.

The two who experience this go back to Jerusalem and tell the disciples; while they are gathered the risen Christ stand among them.

All the elements we talked about last week: the gathering, the Peace, the proclamation, the physicality of the body, and other elements that informed the shaping of the Liturgy and Christian mission are here, grounded in these primal events.

The Great Tradition is founded on the claim that these “appearances” are not simply one-offs, not simply stuff that happened in what appears an increasingly mythical past but that which happens on any given Sunday as Jesus’ people gather in his name.

Without denying that something momentous happened back then, the Church calls itself in this sacramental gathering to the metaphysical realism of the different elements in this scene. Jesus is here, Jesus is speaking Peace, integration, ordering of desire, experiencing the real Jesus in the forgiveness that is the Eucharist and commissioning us to be ministers of this Peace.

But today we get an emphasis that is particular to Luke. You’ll recall that in the famous story that precedes this one, on the Emmaus road, Jesus had, without the two disciples knowing who he was, interpreted to them from Moses through the prophets the things about himself in all the scriptures.

And Luke says that their hearts “burned within them” as he spoke. They resonated deeply with what, at that point, the unknown, the veiled Jesus said to them but they did not yet understand it.

In other words, their minds were still fundamentally closed, and, I must say, rightly so; unless we’re unhinged none us, not in the ancient world or now expects a dead person to show up and go for a walk with us!

But there’s a bit more going on here; it’s not just the logic, it’s the setting. The Emmaus road story sets the stage, there’s the interpretation of scripture to illumine the central role of the Messiah throughout and the “burning hearts.” There’s the brief recognition of the risen Christ when they break bread together, a Eucharistic touch, but then Jesus disappears.

But now, gathered together with the eleven and the companions, with the Risen Christ recognized by all present we notice what Luke is getting at.

Jesus becomes fully embodied in the presence of his followers! That’s us! Jesus isn’t among us in a fleeting way but in the “solidity” of the sacraments and as we are his Body!

Notice that doesn’t shake any of the psychological realism of the scene or in our lives! Notice that the disciples are startled and terrified, think they’re seeing a ghost.

After he shows them his wounds you’ve got this great line “While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering.”

Whether we gather together in joy, in disbelief or wonder or some sort of combination of the above matters not because the Risen Christ is among us!

Jesus says 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, the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled.”

“Then he *opened their minds to understand the scriptures*.

First off, what a strange construction, Jesus is talking as if his presence with them was in the past, “these are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you.”

Jesus’ risen presence is not simply a continuation of his Galilean ministry; he is not Jesus of Nazareth, he is now the Risen Christ who stands amongst his gathered followers.

Secondly, when the risen Christ speaks and interprets he opens closed minds! He shows how it must work in all our lives when it comes to the Bible and when it comes to understanding generally.

We may continue to have closed minds about a lot of things, that’s okay, but the Risen Christ wants to open all of our minds about the heart of the scriptures.

The heart of the scriptures, Jesus goes on to say is that all of us can change our minds, that’s repentance; all of us can experience God’s forgiveness, God’s perspective of love towards us upending, changing all our own self-perceptions that are rooted in our past experiences however powerful those have been.

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