

Epworth Chapel on the Green  
April 15, 2018  
Third Sunday of Easter  
Rev. Dr. Brook Thelander

Acts 4:5-12  
Psalm 98:1-5  
I John 1:1-2:2  
Luke 24:36-48

Our Gospel lesson this morning is one of my favorite passages. In the past I have focused a great deal on the fact that Jesus reveals himself to the two disciples here in what is essentially a “Word and Table” manner. That is, he makes himself known to them by means of opening the Scriptures to them, and through the breaking of the bread at the table.

Today I want to take a slightly different approach. I still believe that Jesus reveals himself through the Scriptures and the breaking of bread. But there is also a sense in which Jesus uses this Gospel lesson *to teach his apostles how to interpret the Scriptures.*

Notice what he does here beginning in verse 44. He tells the apostles that what we now know as the Old Testament *is written about him and refers to him.* He tells them that all of the promises of the Old Testament have been fulfilled in his passion, death, and resurrection. And he tells them that these Scriptures foretell the mission of the Church – to preach forgiveness of sins to all the nations, beginning in Jerusalem.

We see the beginning of that mission in our reading from the Acts of the Apostles this morning. Peter and John are brought before the authorities and asked about a crippled man who has been healed.

Peter (full of the Holy Spirit) responds that the man stands healed by the power of Jesus Christ, the one who was crucified and who has been raised from the dead. And then Peter says: “Jesus is the one referred to in the Scriptures, where it says, ‘The stone that you builders rejected has now become the cornerstone.’”

Peter is quoting Isaiah, and in doing so is showing forth the very thing that Jesus speaks of in our Gospel lesson: namely, that the Old Testament scriptures all *point* to him and find their fulfillment *in* him.

We can see this even more if you go back just a bit to the actual healing of the crippled man and to Peter’s preaching about it. Peter evokes numerous Old Testament images, including Moses and the Exodus, where God revealed Himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Acts 3:6, 15). And he identifies Jesus as Isaiah’s suffering servant whom God has glorified (cf. Is. 52:13).

In our epistle lesson today from I John, John does the same thing as Peter does in the Acts of the Apostles. Alluding to how Israel’s priests offered blood sacrifices to atone for the people’s sins, John says that Jesus intercedes for us before God, and that his blood is a sacrifice offered for the sins of the world (cf. I John 1:7; 2:2).

In each case here, the Scriptures are interpreted to serve and advance the Church's mission. And what is the Church's mission? *To reveal the truth about Jesus. To bring people to repentance and the wiping away of their sins, and to perfect people in their love for God.*

It sounds so simple and obvious, but the way that Jesus instructs his *apostles* to handle and understand Scripture is the same way that *we* should understand and use Scripture. We should use and understand Scripture not merely to know more *about* Jesus, as important as that may be. *We should use and understand Scripture such that we come truly to know him personally, and understand his will for our lives.*

Knowing *about* Jesus, and *knowing* Jesus personally. I can't help but wonder if that is the pattern that is occurring here in this story from Luke with Jesus and these two disheartened travelers. He patiently explains to them the Scriptures, and shows them how the Scriptures all point to him and are fulfilled in him. In doing so, they learn much *about* Jesus.

And then, at the table, when the bread is broken, they *see* him. At the table they *experientially encounter and know him.*

When you boil everything down to simple terms, this is the very heartbeat of Epworth. We exist to do one simple thing: *To create a space where people encounter the Almighty God through the opening of the Scriptures and the*

*breaking of the Eucharistic bread. Scripture and Sacrament. Word and Table.*

We seek to help people to know God, and the Son whom He has sent.

As we come to the Lord's Table this morning, I invite you to come with faith. Come not merely with a desire to know *about* him, but with a desire to *know* him. And then – like those two disciples of long ago – prepare yourself for where that may lead you.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.