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Our Saviour/St. Stephen
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Easter 3

Sisters and brothers in Christ, let us pray...May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, for you are our strength and you are most certainly our redeemer. AMEN.

“And Jesus opened their minds to understand the scriptures.”

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How wonderful and amazing that must have been for the disciples!

To have their minds opened to understand the scriptures.

Or, more likely, Jesus opened the minds of the disciples so that they ACCEPTED AS TRUE what was said in the scriptures.

Jesus opened the minds of the disciples so that they BELIEVED what was written in the scriptures about Jesus.

PAUSE

How did Jesus do that?

Well, apparently Jesus walked the disciples through their Bible paces.

Jesus opened up the Old Testament and explained to them that what was written there in the Old Testament referred to him, referred to Jesus.

PAUSE

Now remember there was no New Testament at this time.

It is not like Jesus could pull out the Gospels about himself and read to them about his birth, his baptism, his ministry of teaching and healing and miracle working.

It is not like Jesus could pull out the Gospels and read to the disciples about his suffering, death, and resurrection.

PAUSE

No, Jesus had only the Old Testament to which to refer.

And so, WHEN Jesus opened the minds of his disciples so that they understood the Old Testament, Jesus no doubt explained how the Old Testament was fulfilled in him.

And this may have been what Jesus was doing at length during those 40 days between his resurrection and his ascension.

Jesus may have been giving his disciples a crash course on the Old Testament, specifically how the Old Testament points to him (Jesus) and is fulfilled in him.

Jesus reinterpreted the Old Testament in light of himself.

We could say, Jesus remade the Old Testament in his image.

Quite an interesting exercise, isn't it?

To revisit one's Holy Scriptures, as Jesus does, and completely reimagine those Scriptures in an entirely new way.

And the Gospel writers—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—each Gospel writer composes his particular Gospel with this in mind—that their Holy Scriptures, the Old Testament, has been broken open and remade because of Jesus Christ.

Indeed, it seems that the Gospel writers scrounged through the Old Testament, and lifted texts from the Old Testament to insert into their Gospels, to serve as what are called “proof texts.”

Proof texts are passages that verify what the Gospel writers want to proclaim about Jesus.

Matthew's Gospel especially keen on doing this.

But we see then, we have something of a “Which came first—the chicken or the egg?”

Did Jesus reinterpret the Old Testament for his disciples FIRST, and then the Gospel writers just followed suit, so as to compose their Gospels in the same way?

Or, did the Gospel writers reinterpret the Old Testament FIRST, and simply wrote into their Gospels how Jesus reinterpreted the Gospel for his earliest followers?

Which came first—the chicken or the egg?

PAUSE

So, for instance, we have Psalm 22.

Where it says, “My God, my God why have you forsaken me?”

Which are the words spoken by Jesus from the cross.

And more so in Psalm 22 it says, “They divide my clothes among themselves and for my clothing they cast lots.”

Which is, of course, what happens to Jesus at the time of his crucifixion.

Is this actual prophecy that is fulfilled in Jesus?

Or, is this clever writing by the Gospel writers?

And then there is the Songs of the Suffering Servant in Isaiah.

Where it says, “Surely he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases. Yet we counted him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities.”

Which of course, is how we understand why Jesus had to die on the cross, for our iniquities, for our sins.

Again, is this prophecy that has come to fruition?

Or, is this the result of the Gospel writers going through the Old Testament and using “proof texts” to compose their Gospels?

We could go on and on like this.

In fact, our readings in the Good Friday Tenebrae Service, which we experienced a few weeks back, capture this quite well.

Over and over and over again, in that service, there is a reading, a prophecy about Jesus, which is then followed by another reading, a history as it is

called, in which it is demonstrated how that prophecy was fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

But, which came first—the chicken OR the egg, Jesus reinterpreting the Scriptures for his disciples OR the Gospel writers reinterpreting the Scriptures, but then saying that Jesus first did this with his disciples during those 40 days after his resurrection?

Who knows for sure? Maybe it is both—maybe both the chicken and the egg are first.

As good Lutherans we like to say something is both/and, as opposed to either/or.

So, maybe it is both.

But, ultimately, it really doesn't matter.

The point is still the same.

We are to read the Old Testament differently now that Jesus has come on the scene, because by Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, Jesus has changed everything.

PAUSE

Now it was Martin Luther, good old Marty who once said the Old Testament is the “manger of Jesus,” and so he said that we really can't fully appreciate who Jesus is without the entirety of the Bible, both New and Old Testaments.

And furthermore, Martin Luther said that if Jesus is truly God's Son, and Jesus then is truly eternal like God the Father, then Jesus must be found in the Old Testament, as well as in the New.

And this is what the Gospel writer John was getting at when he began his Gospel with the words, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God, and through him (the Word), all things came into being...”

Think about that phrase: “All things came into being through the Word.”

And think about how God the Father created in Genesis, that is, by speaking words.

God said, “Let there be light.”

God said, “Let there be earth, sky, and seas.”

Et cetera.

Jesus as the Word was there at the dawn of creation, because Jesus was the Word, God the Father spoke so as to create everything. Thus, Jesus is there in the Old Testament.

Furthermore, every time we read the Old Testament prophets, where a prophet declares, “Thus says the Word of the Lord...” and then we get the words of that prophecy.

Every time that happens Jesus as the Word is there, because Jesus is the Word of the Lord. Again, Jesus is there in the OT.

PAUSE

When I was eight years old, I received a Red Letter Edition of the Bible from my home church.

For those who don't know, the print in the Red Letter Edition of the Bible is red wherever Jesus is speaking.

And so, we can page through the Gospels, and parts of Acts, and parts of Revelation, and there is red print, wherever Jesus is speaking.

But, where you don't find any red print at all in this Bible is in the Old Testament, which is a crying shame.

Because, in truth, like we said, Jesus as the Word is there in the Creation story, in the prophets, and at various places throughout the Old Testament.

Jesus is there, must be there, if he is God's Son, and is eternal. He has to somewhere.

And again, this is the same argument the resurrected Jesus is making to his disciples, the same argument the Gospel writers are making in their Gospels, that the Old Testament has to be read in a differently now.

The Holy Scriptures have been remade, because of the-Jesus-experience.

But not just the Holy Scriptures, but all of life has to be re-interpreted, reimagined, re-envisioned.

What do I mean?

Well, just that we are to see life anew because of “the-Jesus- experience.”

Because Jesus has come on the scene, because Jesus has into this world, things are different.

I think one individual who is most helpful in this—that is seeing the world differently because of the-Jesus-experience...

I think the individual who is helpful in this re-envisioning is C.S. Lewis.

In a wonderful writing entitled *Miracles*, C.S. Lewis said this, “The miracles (of Jesus)...are a retelling in small letters of the very same story which is written across the whole world in letters too large for some of us to see.”

I love that...“The miracles (of Jesus)...are a retelling in small letters of the very same story which is written across the whole world in letters too large for some of us to see.”

Think about Jesus multiplying loaves of bread to feed 5000 people.

Lewis said, God does the same thing on the macro level by taking a single grain of wheat, and it is planted, and it multiplies into many grains on a stalk of wheat.

Or think about Jesus changing water into wine at the Wedding at Cana.

Lewis said, God does the same thing on a macro level by taking a grape vine, drawing up water and with the aid of the sun, that water is turned into juice which will ferment and become wine.

Yes, God does on the macro level what Jesus does on the micro level.

And now by the grace of God in Jesus Christ, we hopefully see the world differently and come to understand and believe the Scriptures.

Finally, we can't help but also apply Lewis' words to the resurrection itself.

Jesus died and was raised, and in that, we can see how God is all about death and resurrection in the large scale.

In the changing of the seasons—winter into spring.

In the cycle of night and day—sleep and wakefulness.

In the planting of a seed into the ground, and it rising with a new plant body.

In the death and rebirth of stars.

God writes the resurrection across the world and the cosmos, and so it shouldn't surprise us that our faith centers on the death and resurrection of Jesus our Lord.

PAUSE

And so, we conclude this sermon where we began, with our minds opened to the Scriptures and our minds opened to the world around us.

Everything is changed, but maybe not changed, as much as we see everything differently, because of the-Jesus-experience. And we are...we are witnesses to these things. Thanks be to God. Amen.