

"OPENED EYES, HEARTS BURNING"
LUKE 24:13-35
THIRD S. IN EASTER
MESSIAH, BOERNE
APRIL 23, 2023

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY
SPIRIT. AMEN.

READ TEXT: LUKE 24:13-35

DEAR FRIENDS IN CHRIST:

JOHN NEWTON, THE FAMOUS HYMNWRITER FROM THE NINETEENTH
CENTURY, WAS KNOWN BY HIS FELLOW SAILORS AS "THE GREAT
BLASPHEMER." YOU SEE, JOHN WAS CAPTAIN OF A SLAVE SHIP,
TRANSPORTING FELLOW HUMAN BEINGS FROM THEIR HOMES IN AFRICA
ACROSS THE SEA IN CHAINS TO LIVES OF SLAVERY, THAT IS, *IF*
THEY SURVIVED THE CROSSING. WHENEVER HE HAD A CLOSE CALL
AND NARROWLY AVOIDED DEATH, HE WOULD TRY TO LIVE A BETTER
LIFE. THIS CHANGE IN LIFESTYLE WASN'T OUT OF FAITH AND
LOVE OF GOD, HOWEVER, BUT AN EFFORT TO AVOID DAMNATION BY
MEANS OF HIS OWN GOOD WORKS.

ONE CLOSE CALL WAS DIFFERENT, HOWEVER. MOMENTS AFTER
HE HAD LEFT THE DECK OF HIS SHIP DURING A VIOLENT STORM,
THE MAN WHO HAD REPLACED HIM WAS WASHED OVERBOARD AND
DROWNED. NEWTON SAID IT WAS THEN THAT HE BEGAN TO REALIZE
HIS OWN HELPLESSNESS. HE BEGAN TO READ THE BIBLE AND, IN
TIME, HE BECAME A DIFFERENT MAN. HE TURNED TO CHRIST, GOT

MARRIED, AND BECAME A MINISTER AND AN ACTIVE OPPONENT OF THE SLAVE TRADE IN ENGLAND. HE ALSO WROTE THESE WORDS:

AMAZING GRACE—HOW SWEET THE SOUND
THAT SAVED A WRETCH LIKE ME!
I ONCE WAS LOST BUT NOW AM FOUND,
WAS BLIND BUT NOW I SEE!

GOD OPENED JOHN NEWTON'S EYES AND SET HIS HEART BURNING FOR JESUS CHRIST.

NOW, JOHN NEWTON MAY HAVE BEEN A BLASPHEMER AND A SLAVER, BUT, AS THE BIBLE MAKES CLEAR, HE WAS NO MORE SINFUL BY NATURE AND SPIRITUALLY BLIND THAN ANY OTHER HUMAN BEING (ROM 3:23; JN 9:39). IN FACT, WE LIVE IN A WORLD FULL OF PEOPLE WHO ARE SINFUL BY NATURE AND SPIRITUALLY BLIND. SOME OF THOSE WHO ARE SPIRITUALLY BLIND ARE OBVIOUS AS THEY STUMBLE AROUND IN THE DARKNESS OF SIN, SUCH AS THE SO-CALLED "NEW" ATHEISTS WITH THEIR BOOKS THAT ATTACK THE CHRISTIAN FAITH AND THE "NEW AGE" BELIEVERS WHO PRACTICE THEIR SELF-DESIGNED RELIGIONS FOR THEIR OWN BENEFIT. BUT WE MAY NOT HAVE TO LOOK ANY FARTHER THAN NEXT DOOR, DOWN THE STREET, OR PERHAPS IN OUR OWN FAMILIES TO FIND PEOPLE WHO ARE IN THE DARK AND IN NEED OF THE LIGHT OF JESUS CHRIST. PEOPLE WHO ARE BLIND TO GOD'S TRUTH ARE VERY NEARBY, AND THEY MAY BE PEOPLE WE KNOW AND LOVE VERY MUCH.

AT ONE TIME WE WERE SPIRITUALLY BLIND AS WELL. THOSE OF US WHO WERE BAPTIZED AS INFANTS AND RAISED IN CHRISTIAN

FAMILIES PROBABLY DON'T REMEMBER SUCH A TIME. BUT SOME OF US DO, AND THOSE WHO REMEMBER THE DARKNESS MAY APPRECIATE THE LIGHT DIFFERENTLY THAN THOSE WHO NEVER REMEMBER SUCH A DARK TIME IN THEIR SPIRITUAL LIVES.

IN JOHN NEWTON'S CASE, GOD OPENED HIS EYES AS AN ADULT. TOWARD THE END OF HIS LIFE, HE WROTE:

WHEN I WAS YOUNG, I WAS SURE OF MANY THINGS; NOW THERE ARE ONLY TWO THINGS OF WHICH I AM SURE: ONE IS THAT I AM A MISERABLE SINNER; AND THE OTHER, THAT CHRIST IS AN ALL-SUFFICIENT SAVIOR.

GOD OPENED JOHN'S EYES. GOD OPENED OUR EYES AS WELL. BUT SOMETIMES EVEN CHRISTIANS CLOSE THEIR EYES.

THE DISCIPLES ON THE WAY TO EMMAUS COULD NOT "SEE" JESUS, EVEN WHEN HE WAS RIGHT IN FRONT OF THEM. THEIR FACES WERE DOWNCAST WHEN JESUS ASKED THEM WHAT THEY WERE DISCUSSING AS THEY WALKED ALONG THE ROAD (V 17). THESE TWO DISCIPLES WEREN'T UNBELIEVERS OR IGNORANT. THEY KNEW WHO JESUS CLAIMED TO BE. THEY EVEN KNEW ABOUT THE REPORT FROM THE WOMEN, THAT THEY HAD BEEN TO THE TOMB AND IT WAS EMPTY. THEY TOLD THE YET-UNRECOGNIZED-JESUS, "THEY CAME AND TOLD US THAT THEY HAD SEEN A VISION OF ANGELS, WHO SAID HE WAS ALIVE" (V 23). BUT STILL THEY WERE DOWNCAST.

SO, WHAT DOES JESUS SAY TO THEM? "HOW FOOLISH YOU ARE, AND HOW SLOW TO HEART TO BELIEVE ALL THAT THE PROPHETS HAVE SPOKEN! DID NOT THE MESSIAH HAVE TO SUFFER THESE

THINGS AND THEN ENTER HIS GLORY?' AND BEGINNING WITH MOSES AND ALL THE PROPHETS, HE EXPLAINED TO THEM WHAT WAS SAID IN ALL THE SCRIPTURES CONCERNING HIMSELF" (VV 25-27). THROUGH THE POWER OF THE GOSPEL IN WORD AND SACRAMENT, GOD THE HOLY SPIRIT OPENS OUR EYES SO THAT WE CAN SEE JESUS. HE THEN REMINDS US,

BUT YOU ARE A CHOSEN PEOPLE, A ROYAL PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE BELONGING TO GOD, THAT YOU MAY DECLARE THE PRAISES OF HIM *WHO CALLED YOU OUT OF DARKNESS INTO HIS WONDERFUL LIGHT*" (1 PET 2:9).

GOD OPENED THE EYES AND THE EARS OF THE EMMAUS DISCIPLES SO THAT THEY COULD SEE JESUS AND REALIZE WHO HAD BEEN TALKING TO THEM AND TEACHING THEM ALONG THE WAY, AND WHO IT WAS WHO WAS READY TO EAT WITH THEM.

HOW DID THEY REACT WHEN HE DISAPPEARED? DID THEY SIMPLY CONTINUE THEIR MEAL AND THEN RETIRE FOR THE NIGHT? NO. AFTER JESUS DISAPPEARED, THEY LOOKED AT EACH OTHER AND SAID, "WERE NOT OUR HEARTS BURNING WITHIN US WHILE HE TALKED WITH US ON THE ROAD AND OPENED THE SCRIPTURES TO US?" AND THEN THEY RAN SEVEN MILES BACK TO JERUSALEM TO TELL THEIR FRIENDS THAT THEY HAD SEEN JESUS! IT WAS ALREADY NIGHT, BUT THEY DIDN'T EVEN WAIT UNTIL THE NEXT DAY. THAT'S HOW EXCITED THEY WERE. GOD HAD USED HIS WORD TO SET THEIR HEARTS BURNING.

DR. ROBERT ROEGNER, FORMER EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF LCMS WORLD MISSION, TELLS ABOUT AN EXPERIENCE HE WITNESSED IN INDIA. ONE SUNDAY AFTER WORSHIP, HE TRAVELED WITH FIVE INDIAN PASTORS TO A VILLAGE WHERE A NEW CHURCH HAD BEEN STARTED IN ORDER TO BAPTIZE NEW BELIEVERS. AFTER A TWO-HOUR DRIVE, THEY ARRIVED AT A LARGE TENT SET UP FOR THE SERVICE, AND ABOUT 250 TO 300 PEOPLE HAD GATHERED FOR WORSHIP. ABOUT 40 OF THEM WERE SITTING IN THE FIRST FOUR ROWS, DRESSED IN WHITE, WAITING TO BE BAPTIZED.

WHEN IT WAS TIME FOR THE BAPTISMS, THE PASTORS JUMPED INTO ACTION, EACH WITH THEIR ASSIGNED TASKS. ONE GRABBED A BASIN OF WATER, ONE TOOK THE BAPTISMAL CERTIFICATES, AND ANOTHER HELD A BIBLE. AFTER THE FIRST PERSON CONFESSED THEIR FAITH AND RENOUNCED THE DEVIL AND ALL HIS WORKS AND ALL HIS WAYS, THEY PULLED A SLIP OF PAPER FROM THEIR POCKET AND HANDED IT TO A PASTOR, WHO ANNOUNCED HIS OR HER NAME. THEN ANOTHER PASTOR BAPTIZED HIM OR HER IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.

DR. ROEGNER NOTICED ONE OF THE WOMEN WHO WERE BAPTIZED CRYING AFTER THE SERVICE, AND HE ASKED ONE OF THE PASTORS WHO SPOKE GOOD ENGLISH TO TRANSLATE FOR HIM. AFTER A COUPLE OF MINUTES OF CONVERSATION WITH THE WOMAN, HE SAID, "I COULDN'T HELP BUT NOTICE AFTER BAPTISM THAT YOU WERE CRYING—A LOT. I GUESS THOSE TEARS ARE BECAUSE YOU ARE SO

HAPPY THAT YOU WERE BAPTIZED AND HAVE BECOME A CHILD OF GOD."

SHE SAID, YES, SHE WAS HAPPY THAT SHE IS A CHILD OF GOD, "BUT," SHE SAID, "WHILE I HAVE TEARS OF JOY FLOWING FROM MY LEFT EYE, I HAVE TEARS OF SORROW FLOWING FROM MY RIGHT EYE." YOU SEE, WHILE SHE WAS A CHRISTIAN, HER HUSBAND, PARENTS, BROTHERS AND SISTERS, AUNTS AND UNCLES, AND ALL HER COUSINS STILL LIVED IN THE DARKNESS OF HINDUISM, AND THAT BROKE HER HEART. ROEGNER TURNED IN THE BIBLE AND READ TO HER 1 PETER 2:9:

BUT YOU ARE A CHOSEN PEOPLE, A ROYAL PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE BELONGING TO GOD, THAT YOU MAY DECLARE THE PRAISES OF HIM WHO CALLED YOU OUT OF DARKNESS INTO HIS MARVELOUS LIGHT.

HE THEN CHALLENGED HER TO GO AND TELL HER FAMILY ABOUT WHAT JESUS HAD DONE FOR HER.

LATER, AFTER DR. ROEGNER RETURNED HOME, HE RECEIVED AN E-MAIL FROM THE PASTOR WHO HAD DONE THE TRANSLATING FOR HIM. THE PASTORS HAD RETURNED TO THE VILLAGE ON EASTER SUNDAY AFTERNOON TO BAPTIZE MORE BELIEVERS, AND A MAJORITY OF THOSE BAPTIZED WERE MEMBERS OF HER EXTENDED FAMILY. THE WOMAN HAD BEEN SPIRITUALLY BLIND, BUT GOD OPENED HER EYES THROUGH THE POWER OF THE GOSPEL, AND HIS WORD HAD SET HER HEART BURNING. GOD HAD CALLED HER OUT OF DARKNESS SO THAT SHE WOULD BE A LIGHT TO OTHERS, AND BY HER WITNESS MANY IN

HER FAMILY ALSO HAD THEIR EYES OPENED AND THEIR HEARTS
BURNING, TOO.

YOUR SEE, GOD'S WORD WARMS YOUR HEARTS AND SETS THEM
BURNING, TOO, "THAT YOU MAY DECLARE THE PRAISES OF HIM WHO
CALLED YOU OUT OF DARKNESS INTO HIS WONDERFUL LIGHT" (1 PET
2:9). IN HIS LAST APPEARANCE TO THE DISCIPLES ON EARTH,
JESUS TOLD THEM,

BUT YOU WILL RECEIVE POWER WHEN THE HOLY SPIRIT COMES
ON YOU; AND YOU WILL BE MY WITNESSES IN JERUSALEM, AND
IN ALL JUDEA AND SAMARIA, AND TO THE ENDS OF THE
EARTH. (ACTS 1:8)

JESUS SAYS THE SAME TO YOU AND ME. HE CALLS US TO BE
WITNESSES TO OUR FAMILIES, FRIENDS, AND NEIGHBORS; OUR
COMMUNITIES AND NATION; AND TO SUPPORT THE SENDING OF
MISSIONARIES TO THE FAR REACHES OF THE EARTH. WHAT A
PRIVILEGE IT IS TO BE A PART OF GOD'S CHURCH AND HIS
MISSION FOR THE SALVATION OF SOULS!

NOW I'D LIKE TO SAY A FEW WORDS ABOUT A GREAT
MISSIONARY ORGANIZATION, THE LUTHERAN WOMEN'S MISSIONARY
LEAGUE OR LWML. THE LWML IS A RECOGNIZED SERVICE
ORGANIZATION OF OUR CHURCH AND WAS FOUNDED FOR THE PURPOSE
OF "SERVING THE LORD WITH GLADNESS" BY SUPPORTING GOSPEL
OUTREACH FROM LOCAL CONGREGATIONS TO THE FARTHEST CORNERS
OF THE EARTH. UNTOLD NUMBERS OF PEOPLE HAVE BEEN GIVEN THE
GIFT OF FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST THROUGH MISSION WORK THAT HAS

BEEN SUPPORTED BY MITES (COINS) FROM THE WOMEN OF THE LWML. MANY OTHER PEOPLE HAVE BENEFITED FROM UNNUMBERED ACTS OF CHARITY, QUILTS, AND GIFTS OF FOOD AND CLOTHING, ALL LOVINGLY SUPPLIED BY THE WOMEN OF THE LWML. GOD IS TRULY AT WORK IN AND THROUGH THE LWML—AT HOME AND TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH. I HAVE RECEIVED AND READ THROUGH THE WONDERFUL REPORT OF THE LEARNING GROUP ON PARTNERSHIPS WITH MESSIAH LUTHERAN CHURCH AND PRESCHOOL, AND YOU ARE ALREADY CONNECTED WITH MANY ORGANIZATIONS IN GOSPEL OUTREACH TO YOUR COMMUNITY AND WORLD. BUT IF THE WOMEN OF MESSIAH LUTHERAN CHURCH, BOERNE, TEXAS, WOULD LIKE TO BECOME INVOLVED IN A GREAT WORLD-WIDE MISSION ORGANIZATION, THE LWML OF THE TEXAS DISTRICT IS A GREAT WAY TO PARTICIPATE IN MAKING DISCIPLES OF THE MESSIAH, JESUS.

DEAR FRIENDS IN CHRIST, WE DECLARE THE PRAISES OF JESUS WHENEVER WE TELL OTHERS ABOUT HIM AND WHAT HE HAS DONE FOR US. WE DECLARE THE PRAISES OF JESUS WHENEVER WE SUPPORT OTHERS IN DOING SO ALSO. WE DO IT BECAUSE HE HAS OPENED OUR EYES AND SET OUR HEARTS BURNING. AMEN.