

### OPEN OUR EYES

The teacher of the Sunday school class wanted her students to understand the omnipresence of God, that God is everywhere, present in all of creation. In hopes of leading her students to understand God's omnipresence, she began her class with a question: "Where is God?" she asked. As she waited for the students to think about this, she looked particularly at Johnny. You see, little Johnny was not always a well-behaved boy. He sometimes got into trouble for doing naughty things. The Sunday school teacher was trying to give special attention to Johnny, so that he would behave and participate in class. "Where is God?" she again asked. No one answered. Johnny was getting a bit nervous, since the teacher always seemed to look at him when she asked the question. "Where is God?" she asked a third time. Distressed, Johnny ran out of class and hurried home. When he got home, he went straight to his bedroom. There his big brother, who did not attend Sunday school, came to check on Johnny, and asked him, "Why did you run home from Sunday school?" Breathing hard, Johnny answered, "They can't find God and they're blaming me."

The disciples couldn't find Jesus. His tomb was empty. His body was gone. They didn't know whom to blame. Women reported his body gone and said they had seen angels. The disciples were hopeless in grief. Two of Jesus' followers, glancing back at three crosses, left Jerusalem to walk home to Emmaus. Along the way, a stranger joins their journey. He asks what they are talking about. Crestfallen, they tell of their hopes defeated, their hearts heavy with sorrow and cold as stone. They tell the traveler of the One who was for them a prophet from God. But, the powers-that-be, church and state, had him crucified. In this Jesus of Nazareth they had hoped; they dared to dream that he would liberate the people of Israel from the oppression of Roman occupation. And although some women had found his tomb empty, and reported the message of angels that he was risen from the dead, nonetheless, they had resolved to give up and go home.

The stranger, saying, "How slow of heart you are to believe," became for them a Bible scholar. He taught them what we Lutherans call the *Theology of the Cross*—the hidden way of God in cross and resurrection, in loss and defeat, suffering and sorrow, darkness to light, death to new life. As their ears heard, their hearts were strangely warmed. They came to their home in Emmaus and urged their fellow traveler to accept their hospitality, to dine with them and stay the night. When they brought the food to the table, as courtesy they asked the stranger to give the blessing. As he took the loaf of bread, giving thanks and blessing it, breaking it and giving it to them, *their eyes were opened and they recognized the Lord*.

Then, suddenly, he's gone. But they know it was true, it was real, no figment of their imagination. Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, opening to us the scriptures? Immediately, they hurried back to Jerusalem to join their disciple-companions. They told how Jesus had made himself known to them in the breaking of the bread.

I love this Resurrection story. And I submit that every Lord's Day we again live this story. Every Sunday, as on that Sunday so long ago, we set out on the road to go home, to the place of our birth, to the source of our life together in Christ Jesus, to the fountain of living water where we were baptized.

We often come weighed down, burdened with the cares and worries of everyday life. Maybe our kids have been complaining that we get them up to go to church. Maybe Mom is cranky or Dad is impatient. Perhaps Saturday was too tiring, too full of activities, and we stayed up too late. Do we talk of these things on the way to this house? Or are we silent, sober and pensive? Are we ready to join the communion of the faithful, be in and celebrate the presence of God, to be again united as the body of Christ, or are we quite absorbed with our defeated hopes? Whatever the case, whatever our brokenness, we gather and we bring our burdens to this font of blessing, where pastor and people openly confess the weight of sin, hear the promise and proclamation that God forgives and releases us from sin's burden, and we again give thanks for God's gift of baptism. Yet, even so, we may wonder if this is an idle tale or if it is good news we can trust.

We need some help, a word from outside of us to help us move beyond ourselves. We need time with the Scriptures, time with the Hebrew prophets and with the Apostles of our Lord Jesus. So, people of our community come forward to open to us the Word, to proclaim God's Living Word for our ears to hear, so that our hearts may begin to warm within us. Through God's Word—not my word or yours, but God's—we hear good news: God loves us and in Christ Jesus we are born anew unto a living hope. This is the living and enduring word of God. So it is that one from our community, today this one, stands before you to proclaim this Word of God that is stronger than death, this Word of Love that conquers fear. Yet, even so, the burdens of this day, this week, this month, this year may hang on us and weigh us down. How do we become free? Dare we hope in the One who died on the Tree?

So, we stand together to sing for one another the story of faith and we stand together to tell one another what our own ears long to hear. We do not mumble, but we sing it aloud and we declare it forthrightly: "I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sin, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting." At least we believe it enough to open our hearts to God in prayer. We believe it enough to give thanks to God in an offering of ourselves. Surely, to give in thanksgiving a percentage of our income is a sign that we really do trust God and not ourselves. We want to believe and trust that God is good, God is for us, and what God has done in Christ Jesus has forever changed the world. We are endeavoring to live our way into this truth, so we turn to one another with a word and sign of peace. The peace of God changes lives, making enemies to become friends and empowering us to be peacemakers, to help heal the hurts between people and to reconcile this wounded world. Do we mean it? We hope so. We know that God wants our weapons of war to become tools of grace and implements of peace.

We are still on the road. One chosen from our midst begins to set the table with bread and wine. We are being invited to come to the table and to share in the hospitality of Jesus, indeed, through bread and wine to share his body and blood. So, we lift our hearts in thanksgiving to God, for it is right to give God thanks and praise. We sing "Holy, Holy," and raise the bread and cup, crying "Come, Lord Jesus!" We bless the bread and then break it so that all may share this meal. "Lamb of God, have mercy. Lamb of God, grant us peace!" In the breaking of bread, in the sharing and communion of this meal, our eyes are opened. Our Lord Jesus is made known to us in the breaking of the bread. In Christ, life triumphs over death. Love conquers fear. Open our eyes, Lord. In bread and cup feed us to make a world of difference! And so, nourished and united in Christ, God sends us out to do just that. **To God Alone Be Glory. Amen.**