



Breaking Bread, mural from an Ashram in Pune, India <https://diglib.library.vanderbilt.edu/act-imagelink.pl?RC=58588>

April 14, 2024

Luke 24:36b-48

24:36b While they were talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you."

24:37 They were startled and terrified and thought that they were seeing a ghost.

24:38 He said to them, "Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts?"

24:39 Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have."

24:40 And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet.

24:41 While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?"

24:42 They gave him a piece of broiled fish,

24:43 and he took it and ate in their presence.

24:44 Then he said 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."

24:45 Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures,

24:46 and he said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day,

24:47 and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.

24:48 You are witnesses of these things.

Are you a Witness?

Prayer: Use our questions and conundrums, O God, to open our understanding of the scriptures. Help us to see the possibilities you set before us as your children when we turn from our lies and live by your truth. Strengthen our faith and our love...

In this morning's scripture, which is the culmination of the Easter story, Jesus helped the disciples to understand the scriptures. He says this: "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." And they understood what the prophecies meant: that the Messiah would die and be raised again on the third day for the forgiveness of sins. And that this should be proclaimed beginning in Jerusalem, and reaching all the way to Niantic, CT.

Do you believe that? Is it true? Obviously, it does not say Niantic, in the Bible, but it means that. Clearly. Is it true?

And what do we mean when we say the Bible is true? Jesus was proving his resurrection to his disciples, who thought he was a ghost. Jesus proves he is living by appearing to them, wounds and all, and eats some fish. Ghosts do not eat fish, do they? The fact that he ate with them helped them to figure out what had happened. He is not a ghost...he is alive...what manner of truth is this? What does that prove? What does it mean?

Most of us when we say that something is true mean that it is a fact. But there are a lot of ways of discovering facts. I was an English major once upon a time, and as an English major you get a long running meditation on the nature of truth... ironically by reading mostly fiction. Fiction is not true, but great fiction is meaningful, and we love it because it conveys important truths. Most of us will put down a book or turn off a movie if we find we do not like any of the characters and have stopped caring about what happens to them. If it does not "ring true." Margaret Mitchell's book *Gone with the Wind* is all fiction, but many argue it encapsulates better than any other single work the issues at the center of the Civil War. John Grisham authored a book called "The Firm" which is a fully accurate portrayal of the American legal

system, all of it fiction. Fiction and non-fiction, poetry and biography could all be said to be true or truthful. And you expect them to be true in different ways.

When Jesus opened the minds of the disciples to understand the scriptures, he opened their minds to understand truth in a whole variety of types of literature, as well as to see its application for their own day. The Bible contains history, law, poetry, prophesy, prayers, proverbs, sermons, parables, genealogies, polemics, letters, affirmations, allegories, and eye-witness accounts, some of it written in good times, other parts written during deep persecution. All of it is true, all of it attests in some manner, to God. Jesus opened their minds to this. To the truth of it all, how it fits together, how the old prophecies are fulfilled, how God's purpose has been the same from the beginning, how he himself went through his life and suffered death for this: to call a people to himself.

Beginning a life of faith begins the process of having the scriptures opened. Like with a good friend the more we give to our relationship with God, the more we are given in return. If you read the scriptures, you will find that eventually the scriptures read you. In today's gospel reading the despondent, fearful disciples are huddled together after the death of Jesus. What will become of them now? Then without warning, the risen Christ comes and stands among them. They do not know what to make of it. Some think it is a ghost. Most are just scared. Then Jesus speaks to them, shows them the scars in his hands and feet. He joins them doing something no ghost could do – eating. Then he begins to explain, "He opened their minds to understand the scriptures."

Did this truly happen, just the way Luke tells it? I do not know...I was not there...but I do know that it is true. I am an eyewitness to just this kind of thing. It does not happen all the time, but sometimes what Luke describes truly happens. It often happens in this room, people come in, they are not sure what to expect, worn out from some serious issues they have been carrying, frightened. A lot of us arrive here with a lot more doubt than faith. Then as we move through the service, something happens. In song, in prayer, in scripture and reflection. There is a presence, mysterious, inexplicable, but nevertheless real. It does not just happen here, but it happens.

The scriptures open. We are reminded of who God is, God's immense love, and we are reminded of our own best selves – the beloved child of God that is at the center of our identities. And that our neighbor is also a beloved child of God.

We are not here because we understand everything in the Bible or ever will. We are not here to tell other people how they have gotten it wrong. We are here as those listening, waiting for Jesus, to come and stand among us. And he does. He heals our doubts, calms our fears, strengthens us, and reveals himself and his word in us.

If the scriptures are opening to you, you will understand that the prophecies are being fulfilled, that the parables are a guide to living, that the law is good, that the history of God with a covenant people matters; that the polemics are for Jesus' defense, that the letters are for the

up-building of the body of Christ, and that the poetry still carries divine truth; if we understand all this, it is not because we are smarter than other people. It is a gift, as part of Jesus' promise to come to us, not to leave us alone, to give us what we need to be the body of Christ today – even all the way over here in Niantic. And he does.

You are witnesses to these things. It is all true. He stands among us.

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Niantic Community Church
170 Pennsylvania Avenue
Niantic, CT 06357