

**“Open Minds Make for Better Understanding”**

Meditation Preached by The Rev. Jennifer Cameron

May 24, 2020 – St. Columba Presbyterian Church, Belleville

**Hymns for Worship Video – May 24, 2020**

Breathe On Me Breath Of God #389 in the Book of Praise Vv. 1, 3 & 4

*(words adapted to be consistent with the Book of Praise)*

Breathe on me breath of God; Fill me with life anew

That I may love what Thou dost love, and do what Thou wouldst do

Breathe on me breath of God, Till I am wholly Thine

Until this earthly part of me glows with Thy fire divine

Breathe on me breath of God; So shall I never die

But live with Thee the perfect life of Thine eternity

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Speak, Lord, in the Stillness #442 in the Book of Praise Vv. 1, 3, 4 & 5

*(words adapted to be consistent with the Book of Praise)*

Speak Lord in the stillness; Speak your word to me

Hushed my heart to listen, in expectancy

For the words you give me, they are life indeed

Living bread from Heaven, now my spirit feed

Speak your servant listens; Be not silent Lord

Let me know your presence; Let your voice be heard

Fill me with the knowledge of your glorious will

All you own good pleasure in my life fulfil

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Rejoice, the Lord is King #267 in the Book of Praise Vv. 1, 4 & 5

*(words adapted to be consistent with the Book of Praise)*

Rejoice the Lord is King  
Your Sovereign Lord adore  
Give thanks O mortals, sing, and triumph evermore  
Lift up your heart;  
Lift up your voice; Rejoice again I say, rejoice

He sits at God's right hand  
Till all his foes submit  
And bow to his command, and fall beneath His feet  
Lift up your heart;  
Lift up your voice; Rejoice again I say, rejoice

Rejoice in glorious hope  
For Christ the Judge shall come  
And take the faithful up to their eternal home  
We soon shall hear the archangel's voice;  
The trump of God shall sound: rejoice

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**Scripture Texts: Luke 24:44-53 (NIV)**

<sup>44</sup> He said to them, “This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.”

<sup>45</sup> Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. <sup>46</sup> He told them, “This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, <sup>47</sup> and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. <sup>48</sup> You are witnesses of these things. <sup>49</sup> I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.”

<sup>50</sup> When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them. <sup>51</sup> While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven. <sup>52</sup> Then they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. <sup>53</sup> And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God.

**Ephesians 1:15-23 (NIV)**

<sup>15</sup> For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God’s people, <sup>16</sup> I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. <sup>17</sup> I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. <sup>18</sup> I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, <sup>19</sup> and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength <sup>20</sup> he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, <sup>21</sup> far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. <sup>22</sup> And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, <sup>23</sup> which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

## **Meditation**

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

I was at a store with my son last week, and he said he wanted to take a look through the tech section. He was looking for a game, or headphones, or whatever it is teenaged boys look for in tech sections. I wasn't in any hurry, so I went off to entertain myself by perusing the t-shirts, the ones with funny sayings on them. There were some good ones, and I actually caught myself giggling out loud at a couple of them. One stood out for me as something my kids might say to me on any given day. "I can explain it to you, but I can't understand it for you." How true. So many times one of the men in my house will start to tell me about something and I'm sure my eyes glaze over as I wonder what language they are speaking. My dear husband, with all good intentions, often explains how something works, or what he's going to do to make something work, and the same glaze shows up. There are certain things I just can't seem to wrap my head around – like video games, electric guitars, and why the gas in this container goes in the chain saw but not the lawn mower. These poor guys are rather patient with me, but I can just imagine what is going through their minds when the glazed eye thing happens. Or maybe I should leave that one alone.

Have you ever had that happen to you? Someone tries to explain something to you, and you know it must make sense, but you just can't grasp it? Maybe it was high school math, or the rules of grammar; Parents explaining why their kids need to cut back on screen time; Computers.

When the moment of understanding comes though, it can be quite a powerful thing. Whether the understanding is something we had hoped would not be the case, or it is something with which we have struggled for a long time and we finally 'get it,' it's as if a door opens and we suddenly step into a whole new bit of knowledge. It's what a professor I had at Knox College used to call an 'Aha!' moment; that moment when the light goes on and the murkiness clears. Our minds are 'unlocked' so to speak, and we grow that much more in how we see things.

I was reading the musings of another preacher this week, and he reflected on the story of the ascension, and the moment when the disciples' minds were opened and they finally understood. He began with the reminder that a few weeks ago we heard the story of Thomas and his questions about Jesus' post-resurrection appearance among his friends. This week, we are sharing the story of Jesus being lifted up to heaven to take his place beside God, and how the disciples react to this appearance, and disappearance. He

points out that Jesus suddenly appeared, and yet again the disciples were fearful and unbelieving. “Why?” this preacher asks.

He writes, “...here Jesus was standing right in front of them and they couldn’t believe their eyes. Thomas in John’s account didn’t see Jesus and doubted, but in Luke’s account the disciples have doubt even as Jesus stands before them... It makes you wonder why. Didn’t they hear the teachings of Jesus? Didn’t they hear Jesus talk to them about the sign of Jonah; didn’t he explain that ‘the son of man will be killed, but on the third day he will rise again?’ So, why were they so surprised and unbelieving when Jesus appeared to them after the resurrection?”<sup>1</sup>

They were surprised and afraid because they lacked understanding. They had heard, but not understood. It had been explained, several times, but still they did not understand. That part of their minds was locked until they had their “Aha!” moment. And that moment came only because Jesus had the key. Jesus unlocked their minds. Or rather, he *opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures* (v. 45). They finally understood the Law and the Psalms and the Prophets. They understood what they had been taught for so long. They knew what had been said, but they did not understand that Jesus was the fulfilment of all of that teaching, until Jesus opened their minds.

It’s about time, we might say. But who are we to judge? Would we have understood had we been among the disciples? Would we understand now if Jesus were to appear among us? Would we believe what was right before our eyes?

We would if Jesus’ wanted us to. We would if Jesus opened our minds. Only he can do that. Only he, by the power of his Spirit, can give us true understanding of the Scriptures.

The sermon I was reading used the image of a Sunday School class as the preacher painted a picture of what that moment might have been like. There would have been a chorus of “Ahhh!” “Ohh!” “Riiiiight!” “Of course!” “Why didn’t I see that?”<sup>2</sup> as Jesus unlocked the door, cleared the murkiness, shone light in the darkness.

It’s quite an image, isn’t it? I think we can likely place ourselves in that scenario and hear ourselves uttering one of those exclamations. But here’s the thing to note: The disciples did not come to this understanding by their own intellectual effort. I’m sure they had tried, but obviously had not quite gotten there yet. It took Jesus to bring revelation to their minds for them to really understand. No human mind can ever fully comprehend Jesus without the power of the Holy Spirit to give us that understanding. We might read the story and wonder why it took them so long to get it. Well, it was because they

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<sup>1</sup> From a sermon by Rev. Frank Schaefer, “Better Late than Never.” Found in the sermon bank on [desperatepreacher.com](http://desperatepreacher.com)

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

couldn't. Human minds are too limited. We cannot think like God thinks because our minds are not God's mind! So we need God's help to get us there. We need Jesus to open our minds. We need the Holy Spirit to give us understanding.

This is why we have a prayer for understanding before we read the Scriptures in worship or in study. We need God's help to open our ears to hear, our hearts to receive, and our minds to understand. And we need it every time we open the Word.

There is a beautiful song from the Taizé community in France that has a repetitive choral accompaniment while the soloist sings the verses. *Veni Sancte Spiritus*... Come Holy Spirit. I first learned it with the Knox College choir, and it's in the Book of Praise. The verses are lovely and are a call for the Spirit to bless the church, to bless the people of God with light, strength, and grace:

Come, Holy Spirit;  
From heaven shine forth with your glorious light.  
*Veni Sancte Spiritus.*  
Come from the four winds, O Spirit;  
Come breath of God;  
Disperse the shadows over us;  
Renew and strengthen your people.  
*Veni Sancte Spiritus.*  
Father of the poor, come to our poverty.  
Shower upon us the seven gifts of your grace.  
Be the light of our lives. O come!  
*Veni Sancte Spiritus.*<sup>3</sup>

Next week we will celebrate Pentecost Sunday, the day on which the Spirit descended upon those listening to Peter preach, and breathed the church into life. On that day, God opened the minds of the gathered people to understand what they were hearing, each in his or her own language. What an amazing thing... the mystery of the Gospel opened to those whose lives would be enriched, challenged, encouraged, certainly changed, by hearing it so that they could understand.

Normally, we would gather for Communion for the day of Pentecost, but in these times when we cannot physically gather, we will miss that special time of sharing the sacrament that reminds us of the gift of God's grace in the death and resurrection of Jesus. However, as much as we are prevented from gathering in the sanctuary, we cannot be prevented from gathering in the Spirit. During worship next week, I will lead a virtual

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<sup>3</sup> "Come Holy Spirit/Veni Sancte Spiritus" ©Les Presses de Taizé (France), 1978, 1980, 1981. Words: Latin, anonymous, paraphrase, Jacques Berthier; Music: Jacques Berthier. Found at #383 in the Book of Praise, The Presbyterian Church in Canada.

communion service, and you are invited to take bread and cup along with sisters and brothers in the St. Columba community, as well as people from different communities who are joining us for worship from wherever they are. Have some bread and drink with you as you watch. It will be different, but we will be blessed by knowing nothing can separate us from the love of God revealed in Christ Jesus, and nothing can prevent us from sharing the sacrament that Jesus has given us, even when we cannot physically be together. For those without online access, who are receiving the printed sermons, as soon as small numbers of people are permitted to gather I will be hosting small group or home communion services for those who have not received the sacrament during the pandemic.

Jesus opened the minds of his disciples so they could understand the Scriptures before he was taken to the Father. In this time of worship within our individual homes, we are still blessed by the presence of the Spirit, who is opening our minds to new ways of worshipping and serving our gracious God. Only Jesus holds that key, and when our hearts are open to him, he does open our minds to better understand his Gospel. Thanks be to God that we can know and love Jesus more fully, because he loves us to the fullest understanding of love – God’s understanding, which is above and beyond all others. Amen.