

THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER

Luke 24:13-35

Is your Bible open?

The great theologian, Nicholas of Shields, once said, “Jesus holds us all in His hands, and when He prays, I’m pretty sure we get smashed.” Cute, right? But is it that far from the truth, or at least from how we feel sometimes, especially when Jesus sends hurdles to help train us in faith? Doesn’t Jesus sometimes leave us feeling smashed in His hands, wondering what gives, why everything seems to be so hard all the time, when we’re going to get through this test or that trial or this funk.

The Emmaus disciples felt that way. Their confusion and disappointment was almost palpable. They wanted answers, and there didn’t seem to be any. And now this guy comes along and wants to know what’s wrong. The short answer was everything. Their world was upside down, inside out, and spinning the wrong way. In thinly veiled annoyance, they ask, “*Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?*”

And your heart almost breaks as they go on. “*But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.*” Did you catch that? “*We had hoped.*” I’m no English teacher, but I am pretty sure that’s what we’d consider a form of the past tense. Jesus had let them down. Jesus wasn’t what they’d thought He was. Jesus hadn’t followed their plans and fulfilled their dreams. No, He had gone and ruined it all by following God’s plans and fulfilling the Scriptures, every last jot and tittle of them.

But you’ve walked the road to Emmaus, and so have I. “We had plans, Jesus. We had dreams, Jesus. We knew exactly the kind of Jesus we wanted you to be, Jesus. So why’d you go and turn over all the tables again, Jesus? Why couldn’t you just let things be, Jesus? We were happy, Jesus. And now what? What do we do now, Jesus? Where do we go now, Jesus? What are we supposed to think now, Jesus?”

You know why I cut my hair this last time? The gray hair is slowly conquering the sides of my dome. Before I joked I had one for each member. Well, God must be planning for membership to explode here soon.

So, as I cut my hair, I was thinking about many things that have changed just in my relatively short lifetime, and not just my hair color. Take computers, for instance. I remember when computer class was when you went to the lab and typed on your Apple IIE. That’s right. That’s all you could really do with them: type. And then you’d read what you typed on that beautiful green screen. For fun, once in a while we’d switch up the keys on a buddy’s keyboard when he had a typing test, but that was about as exciting as it got.

And now we have the internet. And with the internet we have the world at our fingertips: a blessing and a curse. You can read great theology with the click of a button. But you can also see every kind of depravity with the click of a button.

With the internet has come a cultural change. We don’t wait anymore. When we want to know something, we hit a few buttons and expect quick answers. Few wrestle with thought. Few dig in for real research. No, Google will find us all we want to know.

Many view the Bible like the internet. All of us at one time or another view the Bible like the internet. We want quick answers. How do I fix this? How do I get that? Few wrestle with the Bible’s

thoughts. Few dig in for real research. We want what we want to know and little more and with the least possible effort.

Is your Bible open? No, I don't mean what you think I mean. I could care less whether or not you've cracked it open and turned to a page. That won't do you a lick of good unless it's really open. Let me explain.

A large part of the Reformation was about how we read the Bible. Is the Bible something only understandable to a few, and then only through tradition and church fathers? Is the Bible merely a textbook, full of facts and figures but little more? Is the Bible simply a practical guide for your life, to make you a better person or at least help keep you out of trouble in this life? Is the Bible a quick-fix guide, a pill book to numb the pain or give a decent high? What is this thing we call a Bible?

Jesus told the so-called Bible scholars of His day, *"You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life."* Luther said without Christ and faith in Him the Scriptures remain "a closed book." Christ is the key to unlocking them, their center and circumference.

What does that mean? How many of you have tried to read through the whole Bible at one point or another in life? How do we usually go about trying to do so? We open Genesis and start plowing until we hit Revelation, should we make it that far. We read it linearly, in a straight line. And such an effort is commendable and surely profitable, but Christ would teach us that when reading the Scriptures we must think, if not read, more in a circle than a line, with the Gospels, and especially their passion histories, as our guide. The Scriptures are one big circle, and in the middle is Christ. Everything rotates around Him, the Son of God and the sun of the Bible's universe. Just as the universe makes no sense apart from the sun, so also the Bible cannot truly be understood apart from the Son, Jesus Christ.

"Jesus said to them, 'O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?' And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself."

What you need when Jesus does some praying, when you feel smashed in His hands, is not a quick fix, a pill or a platitude, a church father or tradition, an easy answer or the click of a button; no, you need a better Jesus: that is, you need the real Jesus, the Jesus of Holy Writ, packed into its pages, proclaimed by the prophets. You need to open your Bible, even if you already thought you had it opened, because the Bible is no good apart from Jesus, just as no Jesus is any good if He's not the Jesus of the Bible.

And where did all that Bible study lead them? *"When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened, and they recognized him."* It led them to the same place it leads you: to the altar. And at the altar, just as in the Scriptures, you get a full dose of Jesus. *"Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?"* they marvel. And then, as quickly as their Bible was opened, as quickly as their eyes were opened, Jesus was gone. *"And he vanished from their sight,"* St. Luke writes. And nothing has changed.

Jesus will often seem far from you. He will often seem to have vanished. But in those times, you must know that He is all the more near, walking next to you on the road of life, waiting for you to recognize Him again in the breaking of bread, for you to meet Him again as your Bibles are opened.

Sometimes you're going to feel smashed in His hands. Don't forget, the Christian should expect to suffer more than the unbeliever, because the Father disciplines those He loves, purifies and purges us in this life, so that He will not have to punish us in the next, as will be the case with the unbeliever. So be glad your chastisement comes now and for a moment instead of punishment later and forever. And when it comes, open those Bibles, get to the breaking of the bread. You may not find easy answers, but you'll find the Answer. You may not find a quick fix, but you will find the eternal Solution. You may not find a magic pill, but you will find divine perspective. It isn't Google. But it is the place to turn, and it will never lead you to the wrong site. No, where Christ is, there is the ship to Paradise that is sure to weather even the nastiest storms, there is the road, not only to Emmaus, but to heaven. Amen.