

St. David's Presbyterian Church  
St. John's, NL  
"Keeping an Open Mind"  
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Third Sunday of Easter

I was told from a young age that the key to learning and getting a good education is "having an open mind." Of course having an open mind about having an open mind was not on. And so here is the problem.

The phrase "having an open mind" is often used when some innovation is about to be considered, or if some long held perspective is about to be challenged. It is used as an ideal, and so it is rightly used, in science and arts where we are challenged to bring our perspectives in line with reality. Of course, the question is always "What is the nature of reality?" If we define reality in a certain way, then miracles are impossible, the supernatural is impossible and God is improbable or simply non-existent.

Many of us who went to university to study Religious Studies were surprised to find that many, if not most of our Professors were not believers, and often antagonistic to the Bible, to the faith, and to religion in general. Why would you devote your life's work to something you disrespect? Of course there are many reasons for why Religious Studies academics in Canada and the U.S. are often anti-religious and anti-Christian. There are no easy answers to this. But it is an irony for those of us who spent many years studying Christianity and other faiths.

There is also an irony for many who attend church, but do not believe the basic tenets of the Apostle's Creed, for example. We are all searching. I trust we all are here to learn something. The question remains how open we are to learning. Or do we come with presuppositions that disallow learning how to become a stronger believer in Christ, a stronger follower of Jesus? What areas in our thinking as Christians are we simply not open to consider the alternatives? On the other hand, what areas should we be unwilling to yield as Christians? I say this to challenge us all.

I'm sure you've heard the news this week on Thursday from the Supreme Court of Canada making it illegal to pray to open a City Council meeting. This was a unanimous 9 – 0 ruling. The case comes out of a secular organization in Quebec challenging the city council of the Saguenay, which normally begins with a Roman Catholic twenty second prayer to start the

proceedings of Council, in line with their Roman Catholic heritage in that town. A court ruled it was illegal, the Appeal Court of Quebec unanimously ruled it legal and now the the Supreme Court unanimously ruled it illegal and barred prayer from that particular city council, but in effect may have barred opening prayers in all government levels, including the current practice at the Parliament buildings in Ottawa.

Now you may agree with this or not, depending upon how you feel about church/state relationships. But as a Minister that prays regularly in public, I have to be concerned when a Court, particularly the Supreme Court of Canada outlaws prayer, in any public context. I cannot agree with outlawing prayer. But our country is moving against its Judeo-Christian heritage in so many ways. And of course the many commentaries on CBC and other media outlets have their say as well. For instance, the new sound byte is "freedom of religion includes freedom from religion." Have you hear that one? Let me repeat: "freedom of religion includes freedom from religion."

My friends, we do not know how long we will be able to pray in public, once the Courts feel they can outlaw it in one arena. So we must enjoy this freedom while we can. Perhaps you think this is an overreaction. Only history will determine whether it is.

Currently I am free to speak to you about the Bible and almost anything that it says. This freedom may already be limited, and it may be even more limited in coming days.

The passages we read speak about several controversial matters. The Apostle John speaks about the importance of understanding that we are sinners, and that as we grow in our relationship with God, we reject sin, that is, rebellion against God and we frame ourselves with a new identity of being saints. A saint in the Scripture is one called by God, a believer, any believer who truly believes in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour. I know other groups use that word in other ways, but this is my understanding of it from the Bible.

We can know that we are no longer absolutely rebels and disbelievers by accepting our new identity as believers, not sinning in this primary, mortal way of rejecting Christ and rejecting God. John wanted us to know in his epistle that we are indeed sinners, when we come to Christ, and we continue to sin and need to confess our sins, as we do here week by week. But we

also need to know that we are no longer sinners as those who continually, actively reject Christ and reject God. That is how I understand that passage in 1 John that we read which is difficult to understand, at some levels.

Then we come to the Acts chapter 3 passage where Peter had just healed the lame man at the Beautiful gate. Now if your world view excludes miraculous healings, this could not have happened and you simply dismiss it. But if you believe God can indeed miraculously heal, then you must listen to Peter's explanation of who Jesus is, and the fact that it was Jesus' power, not his own, that healed the man.

Peter is so bold as to say, "Why does this miraculous healing surprise you?" We are living in an age where Jesus, who you actively or passively agreed to his being tortured to death, was raised to life and now has conquered death. Peter was speaking to many in the crowd who had been a part of the crowds on Palm Sunday, when he was hailed as King and Messiah, and on Good Friday, where a crowd was calling for him to be tortured to death, "Crucify!"

But Peter is not simply interested in shaming them for their part or their ignorance of what happened and why. He is interested in inviting them to follow this Jesus who now provides a relationship with God that protects you from spiritual death, ultimate judgment and gives you new meaning for life.

This Jesus is one worth following. Change your mind about him, about his resurrection, about his ability to change your life and he will do a transformation in you that will rock the world, or at least some little part of it. This Jesus is worth bringing your children into the faith and pledging your allegiance to God and trusting God for how to help them believe in Jesus and follow Jesus. This is what Chris and Chrissy were doing today in bringing Camden for baptism. It is worth the risk in this age where Christianity may be becoming less popular, even less legal in some contexts. Jesus is worth believing, worth receiving, worth opening yourself to, in the fullness of what that means.

This Jesus appeared to the disciples in Luke 24 which John's Gospel describes as his simply appearing in a locked upper room, probably the same one used in the Maundy Thursday reinterpreted Passover service, that we call Holy Communion. How did he get through a locked door or simply "transport" in as in science fiction? We don't know. And again if we have a

naturalistic presupposition, that is, if we say this can't happen, what do we do with this passage? What we need to do with it is to receive it. Perhaps Jesus was operating in more than our four dimensions of space and time. It is possible scientifically that there is more to our reality than what we see currently. Otherwise, how far do we go with rejecting the Easter resurrection? Do we simply dismiss it as impossible? No. It is God's supernatural intervention for us to have new life.

Jesus invited his friends to touch him, his hands, his feet, his scars or wounds, and then he had a meal with them. He was not a ghost or an apparition. He was and is real.

Of course we have to believe or trust that this is a faithful account. That it is true. He later goes on to explain from the Scriptures, from the Law, the Prophets and the Psalms, why he did what he did and who he is. But how could they understand the Bible in this new way. And the key is in Luke 24:45. What does it say there? "He opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures." You know where I am going with this. This is the kind of open mind that we need today. We need our minds opened by Jesus to the reality of the Bible, and how he fulfills what is written there, and how we need him today. What he did nearly 2000 years ago still applies to us today.

May we have the open minds, granted by the Lord, to understand what he is doing and wants to do in our midst. Let us say "Yes, Lord" to him today in this way.

Let us pray.