

"Witnesses"

Rev. Jeff Bacon

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Let's join our hearts together in prayer. Let us pray: **Gracious and loving God, open our hearts and minds to you. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.**

A Bible printed in 1631 came to be known as the "Wicked Bible" because it reported the Seventh Commandment as "Thou shalt commit adultery." The mistake infuriated King Charles and he ordered all copies destroyed and he fined all printers whose hands had touched the edition.

A Bible printed in 1716 encouraged readers of John 5:14 to "sin on more" rather than "sin no more." It became known as the "Sin On Bible."

The 1795 "Child Killer Bible" had Mark 7:27 as "Let the children first be killed" instead of "filled."

On one level, the Bible is just a book, like any other, subject to typos and human errors. But Phillip Brooks suggests that the Bible is like a telescope. If a person looks through a telescope, they see worlds beyond, not visible to the naked eye; but if they look at the telescope, they only see the physical telescope. Brooks says that the Bible is a thing to be looked through to see that which is beyond; but most people only look at it and see a physical book of words. Today, let's open our hearts and minds to the scriptures, like looking through a telescope focussed on God. And when our hearts and minds are opened, we are witnesses of God working in the world!

During the early evening of the first Easter Day, Jesus opens the hearts and minds of two disciples to the scriptures. It was an interesting series of events on the first Easter Day that allow Jesus to open the minds of all the disciples. Collectively, they witnessed God in Jesus and through the telescope of the Bible they are witnesses for all of Christianity.

Early in the day, Jesus joins two of the disciples travelling to Emmaus, which is about seven miles from Jerusalem. On their journey together, Jesus "interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures." Then, as evening approached, Jesus "took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then

their eyes were opened, and they recognized him.” In their amazement, the two disciples hurry back to Jerusalem and while they’re telling the other disciples about their encounter, the risen Christ appears before them and says, “Peace be with you.” The disciples “were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost.” Even though, just minutes before, they had been hearing from the two disciples about their encounter with the risen Christ on the road to Emmaus earlier that same day. It must have been quite a shock to see Jesus standing right in front of them! Jesus knows what’s on their minds and he asks them, “Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts?” And then Jesus proceeds to convince them of his resurrection reality through a logical progression of proofs.

First, Jesus asks them to look and see the marks on his hands and feet and confirm for themselves that it’s Jesus, himself, in person. Jesus invites them to “touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.” But they were still disbelieving and wondering. They couldn’t believe their eyes! Then second, Jesus asks them for something to eat. They give him a piece of broiled fish and he takes it and he eats it in their presence. In Genesis, Abraham eats with the angel of the Lord. When Jesus raised Jairus’ daughter, he instructs her parents to give her something to eat – she’s alive. In Acts, the sequel to Luke’s gospel, the eyewitnesses to the resurrection are those who ate and drank with Jesus after he rose from the dead. Jesus is proving that he’s alive and not a ghost or apparition. Jesus has risen from the grave and he’s alive. But their human brains can’t process new information like this so quickly. So finally, Jesus “opened their minds to understand the scriptures.” Jesus opened their minds to a new reality.

Ray Ellis, in his sermon, *Walking With the Risen Christ*, tells us about David Redding and his big, black Scottish shepherd that he had as a pet when he was growing up on a farm in the country. David named the dog Teddy and they became inseparable companions. Teddy would wait for David to come home from school at the bus stop. Teddy slept at the foot of David’s bed. Teddy came whenever David whistled a special tune. During the night, no one could get within

a half mile of their farm without Teddy's permission. The boy and his dog were inseparable.

Then World War II came and David went away to war. He told his family good-bye, but there was no way to tell Teddy that he was going away and might never come back. David went away to boot camp and was then shipped overseas for three years. Finally, the day came when David could go home. The last bus stop was 14 miles from the farm and his parents didn't have a phone. David simply threw his duffle bag over his shoulder and started walking.

It was about two o'clock in the morning when David neared the farm. It was pitch dark, but he knew every step of the way. Suddenly, the dog heard someone on the road and began to bark. David said, "I whistled only once and Teddy stopped barking. There was a yelp of recognition, and I knew that a big, black dog was running toward me in the darkness. Almost immediately, he was there and in my arms. He knew me. He recognized me. He loved me. Even after three years, he recognized me and loved me."

Teddy didn't initially recognize David approaching on the road, in the dark. The disciples didn't initially recognize Jesus on the road to Emmaus. Teddy recognizes David's special whistle, and the two disciples recognize Jesus' blessing and breaking of bread.

The disciples were struggling with their new reality, even after seeing Jesus, touching Jesus, and watching Jesus eat broiled fish. Jesus opened the hearts and minds of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus and revealed the meaning of the scriptures to them. Then, later that evening, Jesus opens the hearts and minds of all the disciples. Personal eyewitnesses saw Jesus, touched Jesus, and ate with Jesus, but the greatest proof is having the Word of God revealed through the reading and interpretation of Holy scripture. Jesus enlightens the disciples about the true meaning of the scriptures and transforms them as they begin to proclaim the Good News. The Holy Spirit will support them in their times of discouragement as they are persecuted and as they are martyred. The Holy Spirit continues to support us with the love and power of God all the time, but we notice God most when we need God most.

Dr. S.W. Mitchell was a well-known neurologist in Philadelphia. After a very trying day, he retired early, but he was awakened by a persistent knocking at the door. It was a little girl, poorly dressed and deeply upset. She told him that her mother was very sick and needed his help. Even though it was a bitterly cold, snowy night and he was very tired, Dr. Mitchell dressed and followed the girl. He found her mother desperately ill with pneumonia. After treating her, Dr. Mitchell complimented the sick woman on her daughter's persistence and courage. The woman gave him a strange look and said, "My daughter died a month ago. Her shoes and coat are in the closet there." Dr. Mitchell went to the closet and opened the door. There hung the very coat worn by the little girl who had been at his front door. The coat was warm and dry and could not possibly have been out in the snowy night.

Do angels exist? Do heavenly spirits exist? Do you doubt that Dr. Mitchell's encounter with the little girl actually happened? Or, in Dr. Mitchell's testimony, is your heart and mind opened to the unimaginable love and power of God? "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

Like the disciples gathered around the risen Christ, let's allow the Holy Spirit to open our hearts and minds to the meaning of the scriptures: God's love; God's provision in our times of need; God's mercy; God's personal compassion for each one of us. Jesus, Emmanuel, God with us, wants to open our hearts and minds to the scriptures and to faith in God. Through opened hearts and minds, like the disciples, we witness God's presence and we become God's witnesses to the world. Thanks be to God. Amen.