



Central Lutheran
MINNEAPOLIS

**Open to the Mystery of God
Bible Study**

Wednesday Nights: 6:00 p.m.

Monday Mornings: 12 noon

Four Select Sunday Mornings: 9:30 a.m.

Fall 2019

Welcome

In the Gospel of Mark and in the Gospel of Matthew there are two remarkable moments. They are moments like so many in the Bible. Love is experienced, a love that heals and illuminates. It is a love that opens ears, eyes and opens a path. These are two passages among so many that has the power to open us to the mystery of God.

“Then he returned from the region of Tyre and went by way of Sidon towards the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis. They brought to him a deaf man who had an impediment in his speech; and they begged him to lay his hand on him. ³³He took him aside in private, away from the crowd, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spat and touched his tongue. Then looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, "Ephphatha," that is, "Be opened." And immediately his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly. Then Jesus ordered them to tell no one; but the more he ordered them, the more zealously they proclaimed it. They were astounded beyond measure, saying, "He has done everything well; he even makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak."

Mark 7: 31-37

“As they were leaving Jericho, a large crowd followed him. There were two blind men sitting by the roadside. When they heard that Jesus was passing by, they shouted, ‘Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!’ The crowd sternly ordered them to be quiet; but they shouted even more loudly, ‘Have mercy on us, Lord, Son of David!’ Jesus stood still and called them, saying, ‘What do you want me to do for you?’ They said to him, ‘Lord, let our eyes be opened.’ Moved with compassion, Jesus touched their eyes. Immediately they regained their sight and followed him.” Matthew 20: 29-34

What does it mean to be open to the mystery of God? How does being open deepen our listening and seeing? How does being open lead us to a deeper life in God? What in the passage opens you to God?

The invitation

As always, the number one invitation is this: always, always come to class. If you did not have a chance to get to the reading, come to class. If you are away for a week, or two or even three, come to class. God is calling and inviting you to be a part of this holy conversation, so you are welcome at all the sessions or the ones that you are able to attend.

The schedule

The lesson will be studied on Wednesday nights at 6:00 pm. It will also be studied on Monday at 12 noon, but on a different schedule than for Wednesdays. The four lessons by Deacon Mark, Pastor Stephanie, Pastor Melissa and Pastor Peter will also be offered on select Sunday mornings this fall. All studies are open to all. The Wednesday night class will run for six weeks, and the Monday class will run a bit longer. Here is the schedule for Wednesday nights for you to note, the Monday crew will set their own schedule.

October

2 – This week, open to the mystery, setting the stage with Pastor Peter

9 – Pastor Peter leads the study of the passages that open him to the mystery of God.

16 – Pastor Stephanie leads the study of the passages that open her to the mystery of God.

23 – Pastor Melissa leads the study of the passages that open her to the mystery of God.

30 – Deacon Mark leads the study of the passages that open him to the mystery of God.

November

6 – Pastor Peter leads the study of the passages that open you to the mystery of God.

Select Sunday Mornings:

October

13 – Sunday - 9:30 am – Open to the Mystery of God with Pastor Peter

27 – Sunday - 9:30 am – Open to the Mystery of God with Pastor Stephanie

November

10 – Sunday - 9:30 am – Open to the Mystery of God with Pastor Melissa

24 – Sunday - 9:30 am – Open to the Mystery of God with Deacon Mark

The class structure and weekly reading

Each class will begin with Christ Care Prayers, a time to lift up those in need and celebrate with those who have been blessed. You can share your prayers at the beginning of class out loud, or you can share them before class, and we will include them by name or anonymously. The most important thing we do each week is gather and pray for one another, the needs of the Church and world.

Following the Christ Care Prayers, we will enter into holy conversation on the lesson for the day. Some weeks will begin with specific highlights to begin the conversation, other weeks the questions that were a part of the weekly reading will be our starting point. The conversation on the lesson will lead us to deeper questions, some from the lesson and some that you will bring. Again, like Christ Care Prayers, you can ask your questions out loud as we move along in the study or if you want you can write it down and share them at the beginning of the class.

Generally, our conversations will be in large group, but occasionally a question is so important that we will need to turn to a neighbor to discuss before discussing it as a group. Before the end of class, there will be a short introduction to the lesson for next week, highlighting the possibilities for reading and daily work.



Wednesday, October 2 Bible Study

Sunday, October 13 Bible Study

Pastor Peter Nycklemoe

Welcome and Christ Care Prayers

Introduction to the Lessons

Open to the Mystery of God

As people of faith, fellow travelers through this wonderful, complicated, frustrating and illuminating life, openness may be one of the essential invitations from God. When we are open to God and to one another, we are drawn into stories that transcend our experience, connect us to the primary story of love and give us perspective.

Yet, the invitation to be open is challenging, even frightening. There is a vulnerability that is called for, almost a prerequisite to being open. It draws us into what so many mystics call liminal space.

Literally, liminal space is a threshold, a door way. We arrive at the door, usually by invitation. The mystery is, will we walk through?

Take a moment to look at the image of the door on the previous page. What do you see? What is mysterious? What is inviting? As you think about this door, how does it connect you to the other doors in your life? How were these “doors” moments of liminal space, of vulnerability and an invitation to openness?

For next week

Before we close, we will look at next week’s scripture passages and the options for the questions that are offered for you.

Wednesday, October 9 Bible Study

Sunday, October 14 Bible Study

Pastor Peter Nycklemoe

Welcome and Christ Care Prayers

Scripture Passages:

“Then he returned from the region of Tyre, and went by way of Sidon towards the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis. They brought to him a deaf man who had an impediment in his speech; and they begged him to lay his hand on him. ³³He took him aside in private, away from the crowd, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spat and touched his tongue. Then looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, “Ephphatha,” that is, “Be opened.” And immediately his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly. Then Jesus ordered them to tell no one; but the more he ordered them, the more zealously they proclaimed it. They were astounded beyond measure, saying, “He has done everything well; he even makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak.”

Mark 7: 31-37

“As they were leaving Jericho, a large crowd followed him. There were two blind men sitting by the roadside. When they heard that Jesus was passing by, they shouted, ‘Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!’ The crowd sternly ordered them to be quiet; but they shouted even more loudly, ‘Have mercy on us, Lord, Son of David!’ Jesus stood still and called them, saying, ‘What do you want me to do for you?’ They said to him, ‘Lord, let our eyes be opened.’ Moved with compassion, Jesus touched their eyes. Immediately they regained their sight and followed him.” Matthew 20: 29-34

Reflections on the passage

Jesus is a healer. He embodies God’s possibility for restoration and renewal. As the people of God, our prayers are often for healing. We pray for the healing of body, mind, relationships, creation, neighborhoods and the world.

In two remarkable moments, Jesus heals. In both moments the word open takes center stage. In the first passage Jesus offers the Aramaic word, “Ephphatha.” In Mark’s Gospel, when Jesus speaks in his native language (and it has been saved this way in the translations over 2000 years) we are called to pay attention.

In the second passage, after Jesus asks them what they would like, the two blind men ask for their “eyes to be opened.” What follows is captivating. Jesus is moved with compassion, he touches them, and they regain their sight and follow him.

Questions for discussion:

1. There is compassionate, human contact in both lessons. How do you reflect on Jesus deep care in both passages? How might it connect our imaginations to Genesis 2 and God creating humanity from the dust of the earth?
2. In Mark’s Gospel Jesus uses an Aramaic word for “be opened.” How do you hear this word, is it a command or an invitation? What does this word mean for our lives of faith?
3. In Matthew’s Gospel Jesus first asks them the question, “what do you want me to do for you?” How do you reflect on his question? The blind men were asking for mercy, why did he then ask this question?
4. Ears opened and then eyes opened, there is more going on here than what we simply hear or see. What are the deeper reflections that both lessons invite?
5. For you, what does it mean to be open? How is openness deeply connected to not only what we hear but also how we listen?
6. How is openness deeply connected to what we see, where we choose to look or what may cause us to look away?
7. How has God invited you to be open, into vulnerable or liminal space, by what you have heard and seen in your life?

Final Thoughts

In a complex moment, Isaiah 6 records the prophet’s call and the difficulty of our human listening and seeing:

And God said, "Go and say to this people: 'Keep listening, but do not comprehend; keep looking, but do not understand.' ¹⁰Make the mind of this people dull, and stop their ears, and shut their eyes, so that they may not look with their eyes, and listen with their ears, and comprehend with their minds, and turn and be healed." ¹¹Then I said, "How long, O LORD?"

So often it is our lament, how long, O Lord, will we not listen to one another and really see each other as children of God. Thankfully, Jesus comes to open our ears and eyes. Yes, Lord, speak your word to me: “Ephphatha!”

Wednesday, October 16 Bible Study

Sunday, October 27 Bible Study

Pastor Stephanie Friesen

Welcome and Christ Care Prayers

Scripture Passage: Job 38-39 (too long to print here, but copies will be available at the class time)

Reflections on the passage

When I think about being 'open to the mystery of God', my mind wanders to many stories in scripture. God and creation, God in the Psalms, in the manger and in the meal are just a few of the first images that come to mind for me when I consider this Triune God we worship and celebrate each week. But when I think of the mystery of God, I am drawn to the God Speeches in the book of Job.

Job is the story of a righteous man "a blameless and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil." Job has everything a person could want – a lovely family, lands and barns filled with animals of many kinds. And, with all he has, Job is faithful to God – offering sacrifices – so that just in case one of his children sins, their sin would be atoned for by Job. Job is one of God's most faithful children.

When the story begins, God and the heavenly beings encounter Satan (but not the Satan we think of as the devil who tempted Jesus). The Satan in Job's story would be more like a challenger or an accuser. Satan believes he can turn Job away from God by throwing curses and tragedy at Job so God and Satan enter into a contest of sorts to test Job.

In 10 verses, Job loses everything – his children, his sheep, camels and oxen and his servants. Job is wiped out.

What follows is a dissertation on our human response to suffering. Job's friends plead with Job to repent for whatever he has done because surely Job has done something to bring about his suffering. And after chapters of maintaining his innocence, Job demands an account from God as to what God has done (or allowed to be done) to Job.

God's response to Job is what opens me to the mystery of God.

God's questions in these texts remind me of all that God has done for us by creating the world in which we live and all that sustains life.

God's questions in these texts affirm that God does not cause or impose our suffering.

God's questions in these texts confirms that we are human and God is God. As much as we tend to limit God because our understanding is limited by our human-ness, we can never fully grasp the expansiveness of God.

Questions for discussion

1. Job was a righteous man. Even God says in chapter one, "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil." How do you wrestle with situations in which bad things happen to good people?
2. When have you found yourself wanting an account or explanation from God?
3. Why is it so hard for us to separate suffering from punishment?
4. How do the questions posed to Job expand your understanding of God?
5. In what ways do you hear of God's love for creation in this speech?
6. Where do you experience God's love for you in creation?
7. Would you have been satisfied with God's response if you were Job?

Final Thoughts

Job may not give us the answers we are seeking when we are suffering and facing life's challenges, but Job does open us to the mystery that God is always at work in and among us – drawing us back to a beloved relationship with God and all of creation.

Wednesday, October 23 Bible Study

Sunday, November 10 Bible Study

Pastor Melissa Pohlman

Welcome and Christ Care Prayers

Scripture Passage – John 4:1-42

Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard, "Jesus is making and baptizing more disciples than John" ²— although it was not Jesus himself but his disciples who baptized — ³he left Judea and started back to Galilee. ⁴But he had to go through Samaria. ⁵So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. ⁶Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon. ⁷A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." ⁸(His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) ⁹The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) ¹⁰Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." ¹¹The woman said to him, "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? ¹²Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?" ¹³Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life." ¹⁵The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water."

¹⁶Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come back." ¹⁷The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; ¹⁸for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!" ¹⁹The woman said to him, "Sir, I see that you are a prophet. ²⁰Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem." ²¹Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. ²²You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. ²⁴God is spirit,

and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." ²⁵The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming" (who is called Christ). "When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us." ²⁶Jesus said to her, "I am he, the one who is speaking to you."

²⁷Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, "What do you want?" or, "Why are you speaking with her?" ²⁸Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, ²⁹Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he? ³⁰They left the city and were on their way to him. ³¹Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, "Rabbi, eat something." ³²But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you do not know about." ³³So the disciples said to one another, "Surely no one has brought him something to eat?" ³⁴Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work. ³⁵Do you not say, 'Four months more, then comes the harvest'? But I tell you, look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting. ³⁶The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. ³⁷For here the saying holds true, 'One sows and another reaps.' ³⁸I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor."

³⁹Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I have ever done." ⁴⁰So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days. ⁴¹And many more believed because of his word. ⁴²They said to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world."

Reflections on the passage

A great deal of this story is all about how Jesus breaks down barriers. Jesus does not have to go through Samaria. Most people would go around Samaria to get from Galilee to Jerusalem, but the text tells us that Jesus had to go through Samaria. Jesus doesn't have to have a conversation with a woman at the well at midday. Jesus doesn't have to engage her in a theological discussion with so much respect and back and forth. Jesus doesn't have to reveal himself to her. Jesus doesn't have to tell her about herself. Jesus doesn't have to set her heart on fire. Yet Jesus continues to do the hard things, the unexpected things, the generous things.

The woman too comes at this whole experience with such openness. She has seemingly nothing to gain by striking up a conversation with a stranger, especially one of a different culture who may have disdain for her for all kinds of reasons. She meets Jesus toe to toe and responds as one who has insight and

belief into her own experience and in her religion. She comes to belief in this Jesus in front of her, and then she runs into town to share what she has learned and believed. She had no idea how they would receive her or her message. Faith compels her to be open to share and not hoard this new found water.

Questions for discussion

1. Why did Jesus feel compelled to go through Samaria when the commonly traveled route was to go around? Have there been times in your life you felt compelled to do or not do something?
2. We are quick to jump to all the connections with baptism in this story. How do you see those connections? Are they core to the story?
3. How do you understand what it means “to worship in spirit and truth?”
4. How do the disciples understand this woman who Jesus is speaking with and how is their response helpful? How could it have been better? When have you been struck with silence and it was a good thing?
5. When the woman runs into town to share the good news, she forgets her water jar. Have you ever forgotten something of importance because another more important thing has presented itself or overtaken your life?
6. The folks in town had every reason to dismiss this woman’s news. Why do you think they responded to her with such openness?
7. How has this text opened you again in this reading and study?

Final Thoughts

Jesus tells his disciples this is about how abundant and plentiful the harvest is as the woman runs into town and does the good work of evangelism. They will reap what she sows. She will never be thirsty again. All of this is possible because a lot of people stepped outside of their cultural norms of shame and connected deeply about hard things that matter. This kind of openness is rare in our day and age too. How can we be people who cultivate it?

Wednesday, October 30 Bible Study

Sunday, November 24 Bible Study

Deacon Mark Sedio

Welcome and Christ Care Prayers

Scripture Passage - Luke 24:13-35

Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, ¹⁴and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. ¹⁵While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, ¹⁶but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. ¹⁷And he said to them, "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?" They stood still, looking sad. ¹⁸Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?" ¹⁹He asked them, "What things?" They replied, "The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, ²⁰and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. ²¹But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. ²²Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, ²³and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. ²⁴Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him." ²⁵Then he said to them, "Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! ²⁶Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?" ²⁷Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

²⁸As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. ²⁹But they urged him strongly, saying, "Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over." So he went in to stay with them. ³⁰When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. ³¹Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. ³²They said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?" ³³That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. ³⁴They were

saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!" ³⁵Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

Reflections on the passage

The story of the risen Christ appearing to two disciples on the road to Emmaus has always captivated me. The scene(s) have been depicted by so many painters/artists: Rembrandt, Robert Zund (perhaps the most famous – a painting one often sees in church buildings), Caravaggio, the 10th century ivory relief in the Metz Cathedral, many others. Musically, various texts from the account have been set memorably by composers like J. S. Bach (Cantata No. 6 – “Bleib bei uns, den es will Abend werden”), Mendelssohn (“Abendlied”) and Egil Hovland whose “Stay with Us” has become a signature song for a few of our Midwestern Lutheran College choirs.

Luke’s account is shrouded in mystery. Two disciples – not of the Twelve though it seems they certainly are known to them – are joined by Jesus while walking to Emmaus. Somehow they are prevented from recognizing the risen Lord (perhaps a “glorified body” as it was *explained* to us in my seventh grade confirmation class?). Jesus asks the disciples to recount – to put into their own words - everything that has gone on over the past days (arrest, crucifixion). They admit they are stunned by the news some from their group brought back after visiting the tomb - news that Jesus is alive, that he has risen. Imagine! Surprisingly, Jesus calls them foolish then goes on to remind them all the prophets from Moses on down have said about him, this one who was to come among them to live, to teach, to die, to save.

They reach their destination and graciously invite the stranger in to join them for the evening. Again, just imagine – sitting at table together, the stranger blessing then breaking the bread and BOOM! – sudden recognition of who this is. Right there among them! And then – he vanishes. One can imagine the look on their faces – “Where’d he go??!!” “Wait!”

It is interesting that Jesus spends a lot of time eating in Luke’s Gospel. He eats with tax collectors, Pharisees, with the wealthy (Zacchaeus), the poor (Mary, Martha, Lazarus) and uses a banquet to describe what God’s kingdom will be like. And there is Emmaus.

For me, the Emmaus story parallels the “Great Mystery” the Church has enacted throughout its entire history. Each and every Sunday (or Saturday) we are met by Jesus “on the road” of our lives as we meet together (*Gathering*), we are taught

by his words and the words of the prophets (*Word*), fed by bread that has been blessed and broken (*Meal*) and, like the disciples who don't remain in Emmaus but quickly return to Jerusalem, we go into the world to spread and enact the Good News (*Sending*). Each week – in Word and Sacrament – in hearing and eating – we gather together, and Christ is in our midst. Guaranteed. Amazing!

Questions for Discussion:

1. What does it mean for you that Jesus met the disciples “on the road”?
2. Are there instances in your life when you have felt the presence of God – of Jesus – but have not realized it until later?
3. What does it mean to you that as soon as the disciples realized who he was, Jesus vanishes?
4. What do you make of the fact that Jesus “plays dumb” pretending not to know the events of the past three days?
5. Where do you see *faith* playing a part in the account?
6. Are there times in your experience when your heart has burned within you?
7. Have you been a part of any enlightening experiences surrounding a meal?

Final Thoughts

The whole idea – so central to Christianity – that the living Christ is among us and walks beside us is simultaneously familiar and shocking.

Wednesday, November 6 Bible Study

Pastor Peter Nycklemoe

Welcome and Christ Care Prayers

Open to the Mystery of God – Your Scripture, Stories, Hymns or Images

First, thank you for being a part of this holy conversation. We have had a chance to share a moment from scripture that opens us to the mystery of God. They are stories that open us to God's story and our own stories. So often, moments of scripture that connect us to God are somehow connected to ancient images from our lives.

A story from the Bible about ears or eyes opened is much more about when I experienced hearing or seeing God, somehow at work. How do Job's questions and God's response bring illumination and peace? What does it mean that Jesus goes to the margin to welcome and also speak the truth? How is God's presence, truly among us, both familiar and shocking?

Now it is your turn to ponder what stories open you to God. How are these stories also lifelines that tether you to your story, and the constant presence of God that is familiar and shocking? This is not a moment for Bible trivia, you don't need to know the "chapter and verse" that often causes us to shut down and not be open. It is simply a time to share stories, or even images and wonderings. Sure, you can share that perhaps the Christmas story remains one that always opens you to the mystery of God's love, but just as much you may simply share that there is something about love or hope or grace that is within so many stories. The extroverts can begin, but we will make sure everyone that would like to share their insights has a chance before we close.

Final thoughts

Perhaps Paul's community in the Letter to the Ephesians is one way to close our time together: "I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know God, so that, with the eyes of your heart opened, you may know what is the hope to which God has called you, what are the riches of God glorious inheritance among the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of God's power for us, according to the working of God's great power." Ephesians 1: 18-19