

## **Empty 2: Opened**

by Pastor Kurt Hoover

### **Empty litany adapted from Isaiah 45 (ESV)**

Pastor: The Lord says, ‘Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth!’

**All: For He is God, and there is no other.**

Pastor: Only in the Lord, it shall be said of Him,

**All: are righteousness and strength;**

Pastor: to him shall come and be humbled

**All: all who were incensed against him.**

Pastor: In the Lord all the offspring of the church

**All: shall be justified and shall glory.”**

Pastor: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit

**All: Amen**

**Acts 3:11-21** While he clung to Peter and John, all the people, utterly astounded, ran together to them in the portico called Solomon's. <sup>12</sup> And when Peter saw it he addressed the people: “Men of Israel, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we have made him walk? <sup>13</sup> The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified his servant Jesus, whom you delivered over and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release him. <sup>14</sup> But you denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, <sup>15</sup> and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses. <sup>16</sup> And his name—by faith in his name—has made this man strong whom you see and know, and the faith that is through Jesus has given the man this perfect health in the presence of you all.

**1 John 3:1-3** See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. <sup>2</sup> Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. <sup>3</sup> And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.

**Luke 24:36-49** <sup>36</sup> As they were talking about these things, Jesus himself stood among them, and said to them, “Peace to you!” <sup>37</sup> But they were startled and frightened and thought they saw a spirit. <sup>38</sup> And he said to them, “Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? <sup>39</sup> See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.” <sup>40</sup> And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. <sup>41</sup> And while they still disbelieved for joy and were marveling, he said to them, “Have you anything here to eat?” <sup>42</sup> They gave him a piece of broiled fish, <sup>43</sup> and he took it and ate before them.

<sup>44</sup> Then he said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.” <sup>45</sup> Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, <sup>46</sup> and said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, <sup>47</sup> and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. <sup>48</sup> You are witnesses of these things. <sup>49</sup> And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.”

*...And while they still disbelieved for joy and were marveling, ... eats fish... ...Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures,... (Luke 24:41-45)*

**This is Luke’s carefully inspired remembering of his experience with the Resurrected Jesus. Luke wants you to experience what he experienced. I wonder, did he know that God’s living Word would do that for you even now - 2000 years later – that we might experience Jesus as he did. To have our minds opened.**

**I really want to zero in on the open-minded aspect of faith. When Jesus produced faith in them, he did so by opening their minds. But don’t miss that even as they were experiencing this, they – ‘*disbelieved for joy*’ and marveled at Jesus real-**

**earthly-fleshy presence. A kind of ...what does this mean... type of joyful, hopeful, disbelief. How can this be, and yet it is.**

**Philosophy tells us that the only absolute certainty can only really come through a leap of faith. We are forced to believe something to be true by an experience outside of ourselves. That type of certainty on a psychological level is truer to us than any fact or trivia we are told to be true. In other words, to really be certain about something we have to experience it. (It is no wonder a lost and distracted world is looking to real life experiences like a solar eclipse ... they are craving certainty. A certainty promised in the scientific evaluation of facts, the scholastic pursuit of knowledge, but never truly given. Knowledge does not give certainty. The experience that leads to faith creates certainty)**

**It was Luke and the other disciples and 500 other witnesses throughout Jerusalem of this living, talking breathing man who had just been very publicly humiliated and killed. This was a shared experience of certainty.**

**And let me be clear what this resurrected Jesus had to say to the world then and now... Peace be with you. The rumors of grace, truth and the redemption of all things are true... everything is going to be OK. God came to the earth and very clearly and publicly and with great cost to himself - proved to us that the power behind all thing, the power outside of ourselves, the intangible spiritual force that unites all things is... for you. God is Mercy and Salvation just as he has promised to be through the signs, and the Psalms and the prophets of old.**

**And that most certainly is good news. That is a message worth repeating and sharing with a lost and distracted world.**

***Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures  
(Luke 24:45)***

**Jesus opened their minds. What does it mean to you to have an open mind? Are you open to the many and varied ways the great spiritual river that buffets your life might be speaking to you?**

**Of all the messages, and stories, promises and signs from beyond ... of all the way the great cosmic other is speaking to you ... What is the clear and central message that guides your life at this time?**

**Who is talking to you and what is the cosmic ‘they’ saying?**

**Since the beginning of time we have looked to the stars and asked what they are saying to us. Do they have a promise for you that can guide you in this life. More than simply pointed in the right direction like the Wise men. There is a 12.8 billion dollar Astrology market (growing at a 5.7% Compounding annual growth rate) that most certainly has tapped into the very real belief that the stars are speaking to us. You need look no further than the book shelves and endcaps of Barnes and Noble to see this trend is more alive than ever. Doing a little better than the grocery-store-checkout-aisle horoscopes I grew up with.**

**With the recent Solar eclipse ABC interviewed a well know Astrologist who, through her expertise, interrupted the stars for us.**

***The stars guide us. They are like a cosmic GPS... if you're one of the fire signs, Aries, Leo or Sagittarius, this eclipse is asking you to rethink all your daily routines, the structures of how you work, live, and integrate those things. What do you need? Need to be your fiercest self,"***

***"If you are an air sign, Libra, Aquarius or Gemini (that is me born a twin under the sign of the twin) this eclipse is about your relationships. What role are you playing in your relationships? Do they feel balanced? Do they feel equal and harmonious? And if not, what do you need to say?"***

***There's an overall message for everyone. "Eclipses by nature and astrology are times of the unexpected change. They'll show you where in your life you've been holding on to something that is past its prime, trying to force something to go in a direction it's not supposed to"***\*

**As is my habit, I listened to last week's sermon before doing my research and writing this one. I was shocked to see the parallels from this ancient art of Astrology and the Easter message, and my specific message of how God forces us to let go of things, just as I had to help my baby girl do when she had caught a fist o her own hair.**

**It shouldn't surprise me. The great cosmic power we as Christian's call God is not limited to purely Christian means of Grace to communicate to what is created.**

**But is this something I want to put my faith in? There is certainly a life shaping and guiding influence to reading a prophecy based on the stars. But is this really the way in which creation, the cosmic, has chosen or is destined to speak to us?**

**What if there is a clearer message? A promise hoped for by generations and generations of people who recorded the ways in which God was speaking to them through astrological signs, prophets, poetry and music.**

*Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures  
(Luke 24:45)*

**Jesus opened their minds. What does it mean to you to have an open mind? Are you open to the many and varied ways the great spiritual river that buffets your life might be speaking to you?**

**Are you open minded ... open minded enough to believe that people can literally be resurrected? Can the healing described in Acts actually happen? Are you open to it?**

**When Luke tells us he experienced this opening of his mind to understand the scriptures he is almost certainly talking about the promises that were hinted (boldly) at over and over again in the Prophets and the Psalms. In spite of all the ways this people's recorded history and experience captured their failure to live up to expectations... there was another overarching reality they hoped for and experienced.**

**Often, these people experienced getting what they did not deserve. There was the promise of mercy. The promise of a very real power that can save us from that which drags our life down. If there is a God, and they were certain there was a God... that God chose to be known by the name of Mercy and promised to be known as Salvation.**

**Jesus opened Luke's mind to understand that God was not just playing a game with the people of Israel. He was giving a promise to the world through their songs, prophecies and poetry.**

**God's mercy and healing for a lost and distracted world...A presence that is not contingent on you getting the rules right, becoming a righteous nation or family...A promise, A presence**

**contingent on this one moment in time. That Luke experienced with others and want us to know.**

**What is it that God has to say to us? Even when we have turned away from His mercy, usurped His power and killed the messenger. What does the great cosmic have to say? *'Peace to you!'* (Luke 24:36)**

**(~~As the worship team comes forward...~~) The stars might be speaking to us, but we can be assured through the death and resurrection of a real living man named Jesus some 2000 years ago that there is one central message being given. Whether we dare to hope in that message or not – there is a real and clear message of the cross that has been spoken to the world.**

**God has promised to speak to you through His son. What is he saying to you right now that seeks to guide your life, become your faith? (this is it) ... There is a God, he knows the weight you carry on your heart and soul (your part in the pain of the world, your desire to be perfect), and he has done something to remove that which weighs on you.**

**Jesus Christ resurrected from the dead to give peace, to forgive sin, to take the weight off of your heart and mind so that you can freely and joyful live! *'Peace to you!'* (Luke 24:36)**

\*Professional astrologer and one-half of the Astrotwins, Ophira Edut (2024) ABC News.