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“Open Your Eyes to Arrive on Time”

A sermon by James Compton

3rd Sunday of Easter / Youth Sunday

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Acts 2:14a, 36-41; Psalm 116:1-4, 12-19; 1 Peter 1:17-23; Luke 24:13-35

I find it ironic that my first sermon I have been asked to do is titled “Open your eyes to arrive on time”. I wondered, why on Earth am I deciding to preach about arriving anywhere on time? After all, I am a teenage boy and am somewhat challenged in this department. But I felt that that message stuck out the most to me, so I decided to go along with it.

In today’s world, sometimes it becomes so difficult to see what is clearly in front of us and to arrive on time. How many of us have been searching for a matching shoe for a half hour, only to eventually find it in the shoe closet where you first looked, and then ended up arriving late to school or work? It seems things like that are happening all the time. But there are also many other scenarios where it becomes difficult to fully grasp the situation, and therefore, our eyes seem closed when they are wide open. For example, we have friends who are sometimes sad or seem to be in need. They try to cover themselves up, but because they are our friends, we can still sense that something is not right. So what do we do? We ask the common question: “Is something wrong?” And then, because our friends feel they should not be sad nor do they want to ask for anything, they give the universal response, “Nothing, I’m fine.” Why are we settled with that response? Perhaps it is because we do not open our eyes to see what is right in front of us. We accept the answer of “Nothing, I’m fine” because we refuse to recognize that maybe something really is wrong with our friends. And then, before we know it, our friends have moved on. After a long time of feeling sad or lonely, our friends

eventually recover. Once they recover, it is too late to do anything to help them. And once they recover, THAT is when we notice how sad or how lost they really were. So we arrive late. We arrive too late to help them because we could not see how much they were bothered until they were actually better. Thankfully, we can look to the lessons of Jesus to learn how to open our eyes to better see and recognize what is right in front of us and then hopefully arrive on time, just as Jesus did for his crucifixion and resurrection.

In 1 Peter 17–23, there is an important story about seeing, or better yet foreseeing, on time. Beginning with verse 20, it goes on to say: “He was destined before the foundation of the world, but was revealed at the end of the ages for your sake. Through him you have come to trust in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are set on God.” Several different pieces of this passage caught my attention. The first being: “He was destined before the foundation of the world.” It doesn’t really seem fair that God was able to foresee Jesus Christ before the world had even been created because I cannot even foresee when my next chemistry pop-quiz will be. But it is saying that the vision of Jesus was seen way ahead of time. It also caught my attention when it continued to say: “[He] was revealed at the end of your ages for your sake. Through him you have come to trust in God.” So, not only was Jesus foreseen, but He was revealed for our sake, therefore arriving at the right time. He arrived at a time of struggle and at a time when he had to give up his life to forgive our sins. Jesus could have arrived at a different time. He could have arrived at a time of peace and prosperity when there was no war and conflict. But, had He arrived then, there would not have been a need for Him to forgive us by giving up his life. You see, I believe God foresaw what was to happen and knew Jesus would need to come save us. And because God was able to see, Jesus was able to arrive on time. And because Jesus was able to arrive on time, we have, as the passage quotes, “come to trust in God.” We have seen that God will see when we will need help, and that help will arrive on time, as it did in the form of God incarnate.

This past school year, my English class was assigned to read a book titled *Night* by Elie Wiesel. *Night* is a horrifying, but extremely captivating and interesting memoir of Mr. Wiesel’s experiences as a young Jewish boy in the Holocaust. The novel gives detailed descriptions of what Wiesel, his family, and all of the Jews

around him went through. The beginning of Wiesel's journeys begins in a town that was then known as Sighet, Transylvania. One nameless and homeless character, whom Wiesel was very close to, was known as Moshe-the-Beadle, and he was transported by German soldiers to an unknown place. It was quickly discovered that the early stages of the Holocaust occurred in this place, and only by sheer luck did Moshe escape alive. Immediately, Moshe returned to Sighet where he told all the civilians, including Wiesel, about his experiences. He continually warned every one of what was to come, and he had wounds to show as proof. However, no one would, or did not want, to believe him. Eventually, the town's Jews were taken away by soldiers, and only then did they believe Moshe-the-Beadle. If only the people had opened their eyes and arrived at the truths behind Moshe's cautions and predictions, perhaps they could have avoided what was to come.

Later on in the book, there comes a time when Wiesel, his family, Jews from his town, and other strangers are traveling on a train from a ghetto to the first concentration camp. Now, before they all had boarded the train, they were told they were simply being transported to a different, and possibly safer, location. While on the train, one middle-aged woman entered a petrified state of mind and eventually lost control of herself all together. She began to cry and wail about visions she was having and what she felt was eventually going to happen. She progressively exclaimed more and more about the fires. Though she insisted on there being fires, no one would listen to her or even try to make comprehension of what she was saying. They believed they were just being delivered to a new home, perhaps another ghetto, but nothing worse. Then, once the train arrived at the first concentration camp, every single passenger instantly understood the woman. It was not until they saw the fires in plain sight that they believed her and saw what she saw. Had the passengers taken the time to look through the woman's eyes, they might have had a better understanding of what was to come. If their eyes had been open to what the woman saw, they may have mentally arrived at the realization of the events rather than the fantasy of a new home.

In the Gospel lesson from Luke, we learned of a story of two apostles traveling to the village of Emmaus, discussing the recent events of Jesus' death and the removal of his body. Suddenly, Jesus came and walked with them, though they

were unaware that it was the Messiah. Jesus sensed something was saddening the men and when he asked what was wrong, they were perplexed he did not know of the recent events. They actually informed Jesus about Jesus' crucifixion and went on to explain the story of how the women declared that they had seen a vision of angels who said Jesus was alive. After the women had explained their vision, several other men went back to the tomb, and since they had been told of his resurrection, they thought he would be there, but Jesus was not there, so they did not believe that he was living. They were somewhat a resemblance of the passengers on the train in *Night*. They had been told of His rebirth, though they did not see him and did not believe it. The apostles were focused on the actuality of the tomb without Jesus rather than opening their eyes to realize what the angels had said to the women. This is why the two men did not recognize Jesus when he walked beside them because they had been told that he was not at the tomb. Jesus realized that the men did not see him as Jesus, so he opened their eyes. He stayed with the men that night and, before they ate, Jesus broke the bread, and that was all it took. Once Jesus broke the bread, their eyes were opened, and they knew who they were with. They knew Jesus Christ had been reborn and risen from the dead. Once again, Jesus arrived on time. Just when there was beginning to be doubters about Jesus' coming again, He arrived and opened their eyes.

I have noticed a connection between these scenarios when our eyes have failed to be open. It seems that whenever our eyes are closed, it is because we are "taking the easy way out" and limiting our vision. When we have a friend who is in need, the easy thing to do is tell ourselves that nothing really is wrong. Once we convince ourselves that nothing is wrong, we become limited to seeing how distressed our friend may be. In *Night*, when the town failed to acknowledge Moshe-the-Beadle, it was because they did not want to think that terrible occasions were soon to come, and that limited their ability to see the truth. When the passengers on the train were discouraged from listening to the woman, it was because it is much more convenient to convince oneself that good is to come. They were limited to the fantasies of their visions and could not see the reality of what was to come. When the two men were walking along, discussing the tragic happenings of Jesus' death, they were so confined to believe that Jesus had not risen because the other men had not seen him at the tomb. It is much simpler to believe the men who went to the tomb than it is to believe the woman who saw the

angels. So how DO we open our eyes to arrive on time? Perhaps we should look at the times when the Lord God and Jesus Christ opened their eyes so that they could arrive on time. God saw that we needed a cure, and so Jesus arrived on time. Jesus saw that there were non-believers, and so he arrived on time to break the bread and open our eyes. If we open our eyes and do not limit our visions, maybe we can improve on arriving on time from anything such as discovering the truth or reality of situations, to locating a shoe in time to get to school.