**Homily for Monday in the Sixth Week of Easter**

**May 18, 2020**

**By the Reverend Stephen Gerth**

*Acts 16:11–15; Psalm 149; John 15:26–16:4a*

My seminary education began in the fall of 1980. It was shaped in many ways by the prevailing scholarship across all of the theological disciplines that had developed for Western Christians after the Second World War. New work would be done. For example, by the end of the century, liturgical scholars Paul Bradshaw and Maxwell Johnson would show that a fifty-day Easter Season was limited to a few regions of the Mediterranean world and was never as universal as we were taught.[[1]](#footnote-1) It doesn’t follow that it is a bad thing, but it suggests that study and reflection should be an ongoing part of our lives.

In addition to the teaching of Louis Weil, professor of liturgics and church music at Nashotah House, two books by Aidan Kavanagh, a Roman Catholic Benedictine monk and professor of liturgy at Yale Divinity School, were very important for my formation to be a leader of worship. I mentioned one of them recently in a homily for the Commemoration of Monnica on May fourth, *The Shape of Baptism: The Rite of Christian Initiation.*[[2]](#footnote-2) The other was a shorter and much different book, *Elements of Rite: A Handbook of Liturgical Style*.[[3]](#footnote-3) Among his maxims is this, “The homily is always on the gospel of the day, and one never preaches unless one has something to say.”[[4]](#footnote-4) The traditional argument for this is that the sermon follows the gospel. One of the reasons I have enjoyed preaching at Sunday Evensong, since the shape of my job here doesn’t permit me to teach, is that one can, without guilt, expand the scope for a sermon.

Today there is an almost unique phrase about the Lord in the reading from Luke’s second book, The Acts of the Apostles. So, I want to stray from John. Luke wrote, “One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to give heed to what was said by Paul.”[[5]](#footnote-5)

Luke Timothy Johnson, in his commentary on today’s lesson, writes, “Although the ‘biblical’ sound of [the Lord opened her heart] is undeniable, the actual expression occurs only in [Second Maccabees].”[[6]](#footnote-6) Johnson notes Luke also uses the verb here, to open, *διανοíγω,* in the story of the Risen Jesus meeting two disciples on the road to Emmaus.[[7]](#footnote-7) He wrote, that the disciples hearts burned “while Jesus opened to [them] the scriptures.”[[8]](#footnote-8) In the next passage in Luke, it’s still the evening of the day of resurrection. The evangelist wrote that Jesus “opened their minds to understand the scriptures.”[[9]](#footnote-9)

Since the First Sunday after the Epiphany this year, we’ve been reading Genesis, Exodus, and Leviticus at Daily Morning Prayer. In Exodus, Deuteronomy, Joshua, and Isaiah, the Lord doesn’t open hearts but hardens them.[[10]](#footnote-10) The Greek word “heart,” *kardíα,* is often translated as “mind” because in the first century the heart was thought to be the center of a person’s physical, mental,[[11]](#footnote-11) and spiritual life.[[12]](#footnote-12)

In the Letter to the Romans Paul wrote, “[The Lord said] to Moses, ‘I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.’ ”[[13]](#footnote-13) I find myself wondering sometimes why the Lord doesn’t open more hearts.

That said, I think you and I can be open to the Lord softening, if you will, places in our hearts that may be hardened and to be open to the Lord helping our eyes to see what we haven’t seen.

✠In the Name of the Father, and of the Son,

and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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1. Paul F. Bradshaw and Maxwell E. Johnson, *The Origins of Feasts, Fasts and Seasons in Early Christianity* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2011), 86. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Aidan Kavanagh, *The Shape of Baptism: The Rite of Christian Initiation* (New York: Pueblo Publishing Company, 1978). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Aidan Kavanagh, *Elements of Rite: A Handbook of Liturgical Style* (New York: Pueblo Publishing Company, 1982). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Ibid., 26. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Luke 16:14. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles,* Sacra Pagina (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1992), 293. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Luke 24:13–35. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Luke 24:32. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Luke 24:45. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/r/rsv/rsv-idx?type=simple&format=Long&q1=harden&restrict=Old+Testament&size=First+100>, (accessed 18 May 2020). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John,* Anchor Bible 29, 29A (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1966, 1970), I:484. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. *A Greek-English Lexicon of New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (BDAG) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), *s.v. “καρδíα,”* 508–09. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Romans 9:14. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)