

Have you ever tried doing one of those puzzles where you have to connect the dots? They are usually not difficult. Unless you were to find one in which the dots are not numbered in sequence. Who knows, in that case, what picture you would come up with in the end?

The disciples are working on such a puzzle in our text. And they are really struggling to connect the dots. They have already completed much of the puzzle. They have connected the dots from Gethsemane to Golgotha. They have correctly drawn the lines from Jesus' arrest to His trial before Pilate, to His crucifixion, and burial. But they cannot draw the line from His burial in the tomb to His resurrection. And so, the picture they are coming up with is really pretty alarming to them. "*Frightening*" is how our text puts it. No matter how they connect the dots, they keep coming up with a dead Jesus. And even when He Himself stands among them, and says, "*Peace to you,*" they picture Him not with a flesh and blood body resurrected from the grave, but as a ghost from the spirit world.

Now I seriously doubt if they are the only ones who have ever struggled with the puzzle of Jesus' death and resurrection. Even us. We can probably easily draw the line from the cross to the tomb, and to Jesus' rising from the dead. We draw that line every year on Easter Sunday. Like proud Sunday School children, we hold up our finished picture and think it looks pretty good. "See, in my picture I have the risen Jesus!"

But isn't there something missing in that picture? Where are you? We connect the dots from Gethsemane to Golgotha, just as the disciples did. And more, we connect the dots to the open tomb. Yet the picture we come up with is lacking a most vital piece. What good is the cross and the resurrection if we are not included? If we are not in the picture, then Jesus' death and resurrection is of no benefit to you and me.

This might partly explain why churches have always been packed for Easter Sunday, but not throughout the rest of the year. Christians like drawing the line that ends at the open tomb. But if they themselves are left out of the picture, it isn't long before Easter loses its meaning.

In our text we see Jesus helping His struggling disciples with their puzzle. It says that "*He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures.*" No wonder they could not connect the dots. Their minds had been closed. And no wonder so many today struggle in the same way.

In the back of a puzzle book, you will find the answer keys to all the puzzles. The answer key that the disciples were needing was right in front of them. It was Holy Scripture. And Jesus opened their minds using this answer key, showing them that the Scriptures are all about Him. "*Thus it is written,*" He said, "*that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all nations...*"

These same words help us to properly connect the dots. They tell us that Jesus' death and resurrection are connected to the proclamation of repentance and forgiveness of sins. There can be no repentance and forgiveness of sins apart from Jesus' death and resurrection. And because

of Jesus' death and resurrection there is, for all nations, the proclamation of repentance and forgiveness of sins in His name.

This is how you are included in the picture. You see, the line does not end at the open tomb. It goes from the cross, to Jesus' resurrection from the tomb, to the baptismal font where you are drawn into the picture.

Baptism is the proclamation of repentance and forgiveness of sins. St. Mark tells us that John the Baptist was "*proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.*" That's what Christian baptism is. Repentance and forgiveness of sins in Jesus' name.

Not just one, but both. There is no forgiveness without repentance. You see, if I intend to continue living in sin, then I should not think that I am forgiven of my sin. For there to be a resurrection to life, there first has to be a death. Jesus could not rise from the grave until He had died. And neither can we. In our baptism, we die with Christ and rise with Him. Being raised up with Him, our sins forgiven, is wonderful. But to be raised up out of our sins, we must first die to our sins. We die to sin in our baptism, and we are forgiven of our sin in our baptism.

Do you see how the dots are connected? Too many do not. They separate their baptism from Jesus' death and resurrection. And so their baptism loses its power and its meaning. And they are on their own to fight sin as best as they can. But they will fail. Because the power to defeat sin, death, and the devil is the power of Jesus' death and resurrection which is connected to baptism.

So, how are you doing with your puzzle? If you are drawing the lines correctly, the picture will turn out beautifully. Let Jesus help you. He opened the minds of His disciples. He opens your mind too. Even the mind of the tiniest baby, baptized into Christ, is opened by Jesus. Because in her baptism, Jesus drew the lines connecting the dots for her. He drew the line from His cross and empty tomb to this little baby, including her in His death and resurrection. What He did, He did for her. And He gave her faith to receive it all as a gift. And what Jesus did for that little baby, He did for you.

Repentance is not some grand work that you do. It is simply returning to your baptism where you die with Christ to sin and its power over you. And, my friend, your baptism daily proclaims to you that your sins are forgiven in Jesus' name. Because in your baptism you rise with Christ, your sins all being washed away by His blood.

Jesus already drew the lines and connected all the dots. Your puzzle? "*It is finished!*" He cries. Your sins? They are forgiven, He assures you. As certain as He died and rose again on the third day, so certain is that which your baptism proclaims to you day after day, that you are forgiven in Jesus' name. And this picture, finished in Christ Jesus, is one you can always hold up high. Amen.