

“Cell Phones, Microwaves and the Internet”

Luke 24:36-49

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Stone Mountain, Georgia
May 7, 2006

I still recall my reaction. I read an article thirty years ago that talked about the future and recall laughing. “The day is coming when people will talk on the telephone while driving and their bill will be determined by the numbers of minutes they talk,” it stated quite emphatically. I looked at my rotary dial phone sitting on my desk and said, “Yeah. Sure. And pigs will fly, too.”

That article also described an appliance that every home will have that will thaw frozen foods in minutes and cook baked potatoes in less than five minutes. It mentioned that each home will have a computer that will connect you to people around the world and you will read articles and books without going to libraries or bookstores.

Again, I looked at my Underwood typewriter, carbon paper, television antennae and slow cooking, avocado green oven and said, “These are the most outlandish things I have ever heard!”

Perhaps this was how the disciples felt as news of the resurrection spread. What they were hearing sounded impossible or too good to be true, making one thing certain. They needed help to grasp the reality of the resurrection and believe it. This concept was greater than their minds could embrace. Nothing they heard or read prepared them for what they were experiencing and the Lord knew it. So he appeared in the upper room where the frightened skeptics were gathered, shared a meal with them, enlightened them about the meaning of the ancient scriptures and commissioned them to be his witnesses to all nations. What a difference that visit made!

The part of this story that I find intriguing occurred after the Lord ate with those gathered in the upper room. It was time for him to provide spiritual nourishment for them. **“Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures,”** the narrator wrote in Luke 24:45.

Why did he want them to understand the scriptures? He wanted their confidence and trust so they would follow him, continuing the work he began. What was that work? “Thy Kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven,” he prayed.

You recall how Jesus read from Isaiah in his inaugural address in the synagogue in his hometown of Nazareth. “The Spirit of the Lord is on me because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” Luke 4:18-19. This vividly described what he came to do and he wanted those disciples to continue this strategic work.

He wanted his disciples to be agents of change as he was. He wanted them to go from that room with a new understanding of who he was, what he came to do and what he needed them to do. The only way this would be accomplished was for Jesus to open their minds to new ways of looking at him and their own lives. He needed to reveal to them what they were overlooking and missing.

I cannot tell you how exciting this revelation is for me. I sense in this verse one of the major functions of the church.

Under the leadership of the Holy Spirit, the church is to be a stimulating place where minds are opened, ideas are explored and thinking is broadened. It is to be a safe place filled with love and trust where people freely explore ideas, concepts, possibilities and opportunities that will make the world better by expanding the Kingdom of God.

I believe the world desperately needs the church to adopt this mission and provide this kind of environment. It is the church that needs to give birth to what Robert Schuller calls “Possibility Thinking.”

The church should be a safe haven for visionaries that dream and prophets that share insights. The church needs to be interpreting and reinterpreting scripture in ways that help modern disciples meet overwhelming challenges with fresh ideas and workable solutions.

The church of the risen Lord needs to take the lead in discussing ways to eradicate poverty, eliminate racism and combat AIDS. The church needs to be on the front line promoting justice, equality and peace. The church needs to offer alternatives that rid the world of violence and war.

The church of the risen Lord should be the birthplace of hope and home to those that proclaim it. It should attract people of all shapes, sizes and colors that want to have a positive impact upon society. It should be filled with people that love the Lord and His world so much that they are willing to give the best of their time, talents, resources, ideas and energy to make it better. The church should be the place where minds are open through prayer, Bible study, worship and honest dialogue to discover ways to follow Jesus and continue his good work.

Is this happening? I am sure it is but the number of problems that is escalating in our world indicates that it is not as widespread as it should be.

In my opinion, the church is playing it far too safe. It appears to be more concerned with preserving tradition than solving problems, telling people what they cannot do rather than releasing them to achieve their potential, curbing curiosity than encouraging the exploration of new ideas, guarding the truth rather than seeking it and arguing theology rather than being the presence of Christ in a broken world.

The church is playing it too safe in a world that needs it to be bold, creative and innovative. An obsession with success has replaced the need to take risks.

What would happen if we allowed the risen Lord to open our minds and hearts, enlighten and empower us? I think the church would become what Jesus intended, an agent of change in a world that has lost its way. This kind of church would energize people and release them to achieve their God-given potential. It would be filled with problem-solvers and creative thinkers eager to meet challenges with fresh ideas. I sincerely believe it would have a profound impact upon society.

If you had told me thirty years ago that more than 200,000 houses in over 100 countries would be built by volunteers for the poorest of the poor, I would not have believed it. When others talked about the problem of inadequate housing for millions of people, along with all the problems that accompany abject poverty, Millard Fuller began dreaming and planning. Habitat for Humanity is the result of his sacrifice and hard work, along with thousands of recruits whose minds have also been opened.

Ten years ago if you had told me that the strongest voice calling attention to the AIDS epidemic in our world would be a rock star, I would not have believed it. It is true, though, and U2's lead singer, Bono, is that advocate who is mobilizing Presidents and nations to meet this challenge. Where did Bono's dream come from? He answered that question recently by quoting the words of Jesus in Luke 4:18-19.

Did you read in the local paper last week about what Peachtree Presbyterian Church is doing for every Atlanta police officer? They are providing a \$100,000 life insurance policy for each of them. That's a total of 1680 policeman. Why are they doing this?

One year ago, thirty-one-year-old Mark Cross was killed in the line of duty. He is survived by a wife and two year-old daughter and they are struggling to make ends meet. While Mark's family will receive money from the city for two years, it is not sufficient to pay accumulating bills and make any plans for the future. Mark had no life insurance because he could not afford it on a policeman's salary.

Peachtree Presbyterian made the decision that no other officer should die leaving his or her family with inadequate funds to survive. This was why they purchased life insurance for every officer and will continue to do so for new recruits that join the force.

This is the kind of thinking the resurrection calls for and the empty tomb makes possible. If evil could be overcome and death conquered, what problem do we face that is insurmountable if our minds are open and receptive to the wisdom and guidance of the risen Lord? I can think of none.

This includes personal problems and challenges as well as global ones. Marriages could be repaired, addictions could be overcome, self-esteem could be elevated, guilt could be banished, relationships could be restored, forgiveness could be experienced and priorities could be rearranged if people would allow Jesus to open their minds to new ways of thinking and living. Isn't this the lesson Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount? Wasn't he trying to open his listeners' minds to consider better ways of living? Weren't his ideas fresh, bold and creative? Didn't he reinterpret the ancient scriptures to meet the challenges of his day? I certainly think so and I think he is ready to do it again. Are we ready for him to do it, though?

I recently read an article by Malcolm Gladwell about Steven Levitt. Both of these men are authors. Gladwell is the author of Tipping Point and Blink while Levitt wrote Freakonomics. Not long ago, they debated one another in an open forum on problems and challenges facing our world. While Gladwell was talking, he glanced at Levitt and had a realization that he had never experienced in a public debate. Levitt was listening to him so intently that he knew if he made his case persuasively and cogently enough, Levitt would change his mind. Levitt's mind was that open and he was listening that carefully. He truly wanted to know what Gladwell thought.

Gladwell goes on to write, "This is not a great moment for listeners in American society. The public conversation is dominated by those whose minds are unalterably made up, and we have come to view that man or woman whose views remain steadfast, even in the face of overwhelmingly evidentiary assault, as a kind of moral hero. Those people are not heroes, of course. They are usually just stubborn. In Freakonomics and in his astonishing, wide-ranging academic work at the University of Chicago, Levitt reminds us that we owe a bigger debt to those with the humility to go wherever logic and discovery lead them."

I read with great interest an article about Mercer's new president, Dr. William Underwood. He will take office on July 1 upon the retirement of Dr. Kirby Godsey, who has been the university's chief executive officer for an unprecedented twenty-seven years. Dr. Underwood says that prior to becoming the interim president at Baylor University, he received sound advice from a friend that told him, "Never lose your desire and capacity to listen to others." That friend, by the way, was Dr. Godsey.

I am discovering that minds, like parachutes, serve us best when open. Our world needs better listeners, and this includes a fresh look at the ancient scriptures under the leadership of the risen Lord.

Will you let Jesus open your mind to fresh ways of thinking that will help you deal with your challenges and problems? Will you let him help you see what you have been overlooking? Will you engage in honest dialogue with others as you pray and study the ancient scriptures?

Do you need a church that provides this opportunity in an environment of love and trust? Join us on our journey as we explore, under the leadership of the risen Lord, new ways of thinking and living that help us all to achieve our God-given potential and make His world better.