

IDLEWILD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

The Reverend David J. Powers
Sunday, June 26, 2022

Mark 8:22-26

They came to Bethsaida. Some people brought a blind man to him and begged him to touch him. He took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village; and when he had put saliva on his eyes and laid his hands on him, he asked him, 'Can you see anything?' And the man looked up and said, 'I can see people, but they look like trees, walking.' Then Jesus laid his hands on his eyes again; and he looked intently and his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly. Then he sent him away to his home, saying, 'Do not even go into the village.'

We have in the Gospel of Mark this scene. There are a number of these interactions that Jesus has had through the first several chapters of Mark.

What we have in this one is some desperate friends. Other translations besides the NRSV tell us that these are friends of the man that bring him to Jesus. This blind man. This man without sight. They bring him to Jesus, and they draw Jesus' attention to him. Jesus sees him and sees the deep need that he has, and he gives him attention. This is a pattern for Jesus because part of what we're going to talk about when we talk about having the eyes or being the eyes of the body of Christ, is what it means to not just to look upon someone but to actually see them for who they truly are. Right in front of you. Jesus has this this way of seeing people. He has an attention around what it means to look upon people and truly see them. In Mark five, he sees a woman. After she has touched his cloak and been healed, he turns around asking who was it that touched my cloak.

She first stays in the crowd, and then comes forth and shows herself. He looks upon her and tells her that her faith has made her well. "Daughter, your faith has healed you" he says. "Go in peace and be freed from your suffering."

Later in Mark five, just a few verses later, he comes to the home of one of the representatives of the government there. This little girl that Jesus has been called upon to help heal in the midst of his travels from one place to their home has passed away, and everyone is wailing. There's a great commotion because she has died, but Jesus goes to her bedside and he says to her "Talitha Kum," which means 'little girl get up.'

Just before the eighth chapter of Mark, in Mark seven Jesus comes upon the Seraphinian woman.

He speaks to her, and while we can critique the way in which he interacts with this woman, what he does end his interaction with her is saying to her that that her faith has made her well, that she can go home, and she can know that the one that she wished to be healed has been healed.

This pattern of Jesus seeing and giving attention is an important one for us to pay attention to ourselves this day because those three interactions, and there were many more in the Gospel of Mark. If you want to pull out your Bible and do a little reading this afternoon, you'll see many

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times when Jesus comes upon someone that the world would ignore and pass by, but they wouldn't actually see them for who they are.

Jesus stops and pays attention, and that's just pays attention, but offers healing and offers a word of freedom and offers a word of grace. Even when he's not in the best mood he's able to do that. That's important because the way that Jesus sees people is the way in which the world in which he inhabited did not see people. The hemorrhaging woman, the little girl, the Seraphinian woman were unseen by the world in which they lived uncared for and unprotected.

Jesus sees people in the way that the world does not. Jesus sees people with compassion and with tenderness and with love. Jesus sees people with the eyes of God. He sees each and every person as beloved, but in the scene in the Gospel of Mark scripture tells us that after this man has been brought to him, Jesus took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village. Two things that strike me about this. First, the tenderness of a shepherd to grab the hand of one and to lead him and, I imagine, gently and carefully away from where they were.

The second thing that strikes me as not just Jesus's tenderness, but the need sometimes to be able to step away from a place that you have known in order to gain new perspective. He takes the blind man out of the village, and what we realize is that sometimes we actually have to move away from the center in order to gain perspective on the greater whole. Then Jesus takes saliva and his hands, and he places them again gently on the man's eyes, and he invites them to tell him what you see. The man opens his eyes, and he says "I see people. They look like trees. I can see them. They're right in front of me, but they don't look the way I know that they're supposed to look intuitively. I know how these people are supposed to be, and they don't look like that. They look like trees." So, again the second time a touch, and this time scripture says, "He looked intently upon the man and then when he opened his eyes he saw clearly."

The Gospel of Mark is helping to reveal to us that Jesus is able to give a vision to this man that the world could not give him. Jesus is able to give his vision of the world to this man.

After he's done this, he says, "Don't go home the way you're planning on going home. Don't go right through the village. don't go back there. Go around it."

Once you have new eyes, beloved, there's no going back. Once you see in the way that God is calling you to see, you can't unsee that thing. When you see your neighbor in need, when they are hungry, when they're thirsty, you cannot unsee that need. When you see your neighbor suffering with deep sadness you cannot unsee that need.

The lesson is that once we see something clearly and truly, we cannot unsee it. That means that there is a responsibility that comes to us when we have clear vision. When we have eyes given to us by God. If we are to talk about the Church being the Body of Christ and having the eyes of Christ, then we have to dissect and take apart what we mean by that. What does it mean for the Body of Christ to have the eyes of Christ in the world.? Having the eyes of Christ means to look

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upon the world with compassion first and foremost. It also means to offer a different perspective than the one that the world would give.

The Gospel of Matthew tells us that how we see and who we see will reveal how healthy we are as the body. “The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light; but if it's not darkness.” There comes this responsibility with seeing. Our responsibility is to look upon the world with the eyes of Jesus Christ, and to clearly see the people and things around us even when the world wants us to ignore them. In different times this responsibility takes on different tenor. Dietrich Bonhoeffer in the midst of the rise of Nazi Germany had to pay attention and see in a way that others in the church were unwilling to see. He had to be a pastor and a prophet and ultimately a martyr.

He had to speak truth about what was happening around him, and how the world around him was being misshapen from the image of God.

If we are to ask ourselves in this time, on this week, what our responsibility is as the Body of Christ when we have now the eyes of Jesus Christ, how to see the world with compassion.

Perhaps it is that we would look upon those who are in deep distress this week. we might say, particularly, as Jesus did in Mark five, and then again in seven, that regardless of the messages being sent by our state or by our governor or by our supreme court, women and girls need to know that they are seen by the Church of Jesus Christ. Not just by the Church, but most especially by Christ Himself. Jesus saw women and affirmed their dignity, even as the state refused.

Christ upheld the dignity of women and little girls even when the state would not do so.

This week, as the news came of the overturning of *Roe v Wade*, news that we knew was coming for now six weeks, there is something that we can prepare in our spirits but something that we can't prepare for in our bodies.

Now I was reminded of a story that I heard a long time ago about a faithful rabbi.

He was asked one day by his students how to tell when the night was over, and a new day had dawned. The rabbi said to them “What do you think?” One student answered “Is it when you hear the rooster crow that you know that the dawn has come?” And another, “Is it when you can discern the silhouette of the trees against the horizon as if they were dancing? Is that when we know that the dawn has come?” “No,” the rabbi replied. “It is when you look into the face of a stranger and see him as your brother. When you can see the one who is different from you as your sister. Then you will know that the night is over, and a new day has come.”

If y'all remember back a few weeks ago, you remember the words of Teresa of Avila's poem “The Body of Christ.” Those words provided the basis for our sermon series this summer. Of sight she says this: “Yours are the eyes with which Christ looks with compassion upon the world.

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Indeed, Christ has no body now on earth but yours.” So, Church, if we are to be indeed the Body of Christ, we must look upon the world with eyes that are born of God. We must let people know that they are seen. We must let, particularly in this time, women and young girls know that they are fully seen by the church of Jesus Christ and by their Savior. It's a critical message for us because the message is that the greater populist often hears about the Church is different than that.

We must let people know that they are seen and valued by God. Then, and only then, according to the gospel of Matthew, “will the whole body be full of light” Then, and only then, with our eyes healthy and looking upon the world, will we know that the night is over, and a new day has come. So, here's the truth, beloved, this day.

We gather as people seen by God. We gather to take comfort in fellowship, to be nurtured by the very spirit of God, and to trust and believe that the God that we know in Jesus Christ is offering hope and giving us energy for the journey ahead. That ultimately a new day will break forth, one full of light one where everyone is seen, everyone is valued, and everything is made new. In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. One God, Mother of us all. Amen.