

“When the Vision Becomes Clear”

Mark 8:14-26



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When I was in high school, I struggled with Foreign Language. Though I was a good student, I remember sitting in Spanish class completely confused, day after day. I had a hard enough time in English trying to figure out verbs, prepositional phrases, diagramming and all of that stuff I really thought I didn't need.

I mean, after all, I already knew how to talk. Then there was Spanish class and I muddled through, managing to get enough homework right to avoid flunking, but doing so poorly on anything that actually required an understanding of the language that my teacher began to treat me as one of those students deserving of a pat on the head and a “D” to get me out and on to something else. So I have a lot of sympathy for the disciples. I know what it is to not “get it.” As a side note, to the students in the room, it will really pay off to pay attention in English class and “get it” because you never know when you will need it.

Now I have to figure out Hebrew and Greek and I still have a hard time defining a prepositional phrase.

Here, Mark carefully and creatively structures the announcement that Jesus is the Son of God. The disciples are always behind Jesus in these facts, which is no surprise, but Jesus is surprisingly frustrated at their inability to grasp who he is; but who can really blame the disciples! All that they have seen and heard still cannot prepare them for truth. And the truth about Jesus fits into none of our natural inclinations or predispositions. Even when we understand, we still do not understand.

If you think there is no humor in the Bible look at this: Mark begins with the observation that the disciples have a familiar problem- they had forgotten to bring bread to eat, but Mark then says they had one loaf with them in the boat. The disciples resemble the most absent-minded child in their ability to leave all those extra baskets of food behind from feeding 9000 people and having 19 baskets remaining. Isn't that just like us all to receive blessings and answers from God but quickly forget them; finding ourselves in a bind again and asking for more; when in fact he gave us enough the first time? I assure you that we could place ourselves in the gospels as a disciple and you would fit into every category.

Jesus goes on to rebuke them, but it is for their lack of understanding, not for their fault in forgetting the bread. He warns them that the ideas of the world are creeping into their hearts and they are becoming blind to who He really is. It is interesting how often the Bible speaks to those of us who follow Jesus and warn us about the dangers of unbelief. Today's definition of faith has been influenced by revivalism, and any point or good feeling about Jesus is seen as true faith. The Gospels present faith as a miracle from God that changes a heart, a miracle that is constantly demonstrated in the process of following Jesus as a disciple. Folks, that is not the same as walking forward and joining a church.

Before we pass judgment on the disciples though, can we really say we are different? How often does the truth of the Kingdom penetrate into the self-centered world where I live? How often am I repeatedly oblivious to the presence of God and His truth? Are my prayers founded on my own spiritual condition that keeps me from experiencing the power of Jesus, or am I arrogantly confident that I understand, see, hear and know? My dependence of Jesus grows by hearing Jesus' frustration with the disciple.

The inability of the disciples to see sets the stage for the healing of a blind man at Bethsaida (probably the village outside the main city.) On one level it is simply another miracle story, distinguished by a couple of odd details: it is the only healing story where Jesus asks a question and it is the only two-stage healing story in the Gospels. Matthew and Luke omit the story, I think because they might have thought it was a little embarrassing that the healing didn't happen the way they thought it should: immediately the first time. (It also sets a good example for those of us who believe in the supernatural operation of the spiritual gifts: keep praying!)

The second level is the important level. After Jesus has touched him and asked if he sees, the man's sight is partially restored. He sees people like trees, i.e. in a distorted and out-of-focus form. It only takes a moment to see what Mark is doing. This blind man represents those other blind men, those who have been with Jesus and do not understand.

Here is where **"God's Vision...Our Mission"** comes in to the scene. What do you see as God's Vision for this body of Christ? A new building? No offense but that is pretty short sighted. No, God has a greater vision in mind for us. God's vision is to reach people and touch lives. Our mission is to make sure that happens. The building is just a consequence of who we are as the children of God. The building is only a result of what we are called to do. The building is a result of reaching people and touching lives. Every person here, including myself, has been reached out to by this body of Christ. And by responding to that outstretched hand and coming into this fellowship your lives have been touched and hopefully changed for the better. Because of that more of you are reaching out and more people are responding and more lives are being changed and therefore as a consequence of that chain of blessed events, God says you need a bigger building that offers even more opportunities to reach out and touch lives. The greatest part of that equation is that IT..NEVER..ENDS! So as Jesus uses us to touch people for the first time, or when we were touched for the first time, there is a minor change. We feel welcome. We feel at home. We feel as if we have found something we have been looking for. We find a place as children, teenagers and adults to plug in and become a part of something, but we just don't quite know what it is. We see it, but it sort of looks like trees walking around. So Jesus reaches out again.

At the second touch, Mark uses another of his favorite literary devices, the three-fold repetition: his eyes were opened, his sight was restored and he sees everything clearly. This kind of emphasis lets us know more is at work here than just the obvious. A second touch is needed. The second touch is a captivating theme. On the level of Christian experience it should be a theme of our pursuit of Jesus: Lord, touch me again and again that I might see more clearly.

Did you hear me earlier? Reaching People...Touching Lives is a vision and mission that never ends. Even after being in this fellowship of believers at St. Luke's since 1996 and here at the Southwest since 2004 I promise you that Jesus repeatedly uses you to reach out to me and touch me, causing me to see Jesus more clearly with every touch.

God's vision is to reach people. There is a whole group of people who we have reached out to camping together this weekend up in the Caprock Canyon State Park. I was with them Friday and Saturday and I promise you this: Their lives have been touched and they have been changed because of their new relationships with each other and with you over these past few years. I count them as my very best friends in this world along with many of you and it is all because someone reached out to me and to them. Who in your life needs to be reached? What people around us need to have a hand extended to them? There is a whole city out there that needs Jesus Christ and in partnership with every one of you, I want to reach them.

Amen.