

Beginning to See

Mark 8: 22-26

It was just another day in the life of Jesus, or so it seemed. Some people brought a blind man to him for healing. Apparently, Jesus had no set formula for healing people because, on this occasion, he did some things that he did not do otherwise. Jesus took the man outside the village.

Bethsaida was actually a bustling, cosmopolitan city with a great deal of Roman influence. The writer of Mark's gospel betrayed his anti-Roman bias by refusing to call Bethsaida a city, preferring to describe it as a humble village. In addition, he did not have Jesus perform the healing act within the city. He took the man outside.

We often ask, "What would Jesus do?" In this case, he spit right into the man's eyes! After that, he lay hands on the man and we learn that some form of healing takes place.

"Do you see anything?" Jesus asked. The man looked up (looked around, actually, not up at the sky). "Yes. I see men. They look like walking trees." They looked distorted to the man, perhaps like stick figures. He could see, but not very clearly. Jesus touched him again and the man saw clearly. He then sent the man straight home – end of story. What does this story mean?

This story, in Mark's gospel, comes at a time when the disciples are just not getting Jesus' teaching. They can't grasp the radical nature of his message. They are *blind* to what Jesus' ministry is really about. Their sight is distorted and their vision of that ministry is only partial. It's not until they witness the culmination of his life and ministry, then experience the resurrection presence of his Spirit that they see clearly. For now, the disciples are awaiting a second touch to clarify their vision. The same may be true for Mark's community some forty years after Jesus. Perhaps they are also experiencing blindness or partial vision and awaiting the touch of God's Spirit.

I am feeling some *cosmic spit* in my eye. It's causing me to begin to see, to awaken to some realities of which I was not aware before. My first experience with such spit came when I first read Matthew Fox's *Original Blessing*. My eyes were opened. I wasn't sure what I was seeing, but it was something new.

There have been other times in my life when events, information, and relationships have changed me, when I have begun to see. My first experience of Francis Dewar's *Invitations* caused me to be awake to the process of discerning call, to the uniqueness of my life, and to growing spiritually in an intentional way. It was as though I said to myself, "Oh, yeah! That's it!" From that point, there has been a process of gradual clarifying of that vision.

Some members of this congregation had such an experience when you first read Marcus Borg's *The Heart of Christianity* or one of John Shelby Spong's books. For some, the experience of participating in the Landmark Forum caused your eyes to be opened – gave you a new vision.

Many people are beginning to see. Like the blind man, Jesus spit in our eyes and laid hands on us. What we see are people who look like trees walking around, distorted and incomplete images. We see things even if we're not exactly sure what. Is it a new reality? New realities can be exciting and they can be scary. Maybe they're the answer? Maybe they're not quite the answer. We are just beginning to see. It takes time. It takes a second touch.

Each of us responds to God's touch in our lives in our own way. We begin to see new things and new ways. It can be exciting to have new ideas, new possibilities, and new hopes. It can also be disturbing to experience changes in familiar patterns, changes in traditional ways we

see the world. It can feel threatening to experience such changes in our relationships and our expectations. By way of example, I have been reading *The World Is Flat* by Thomas Friedman. He does a great job explaining the fundamental changes that have been taking place in the world since the year 2000.

We are experiencing a new era of globalization characterized by outsourcing and offshoring of jobs, and more competition from the rest of the world for traditionally American jobs. The rapid changes in technology and communication present challenges for the present and more challenges for the future. Now we see the prevalence of cell phones, personal computers, and e-mail. People are downloading and, increasingly, uploading. This is only the beginning.

The image of a flat world symbolizes the emergence of a level playing field for business. This brings new challenges and new opportunities. Whether we like it or not doesn't really matter because it's here now and there's more to come.

Wisdom is the capacity to see and act, especially in stressful situations, not only intellectually, but also to embrace what is happening in life and respond in ways that are healthy, appropriate, and Christ-like. I'm beginning to see some possibilities and opportunities for my life, for the church, and for the world in this new reality. Mine is a fuzzy vision that is getting clearer. I think I'm beginning to see. Maybe I'm getting *second touched*? I wonder what you're beginning to see – opportunities for yourself, your family, the church, and the nation today. It may not be clear yet, but you're beginning to see it.

I'm beginning to see rapid and fundamental changes in the world. Changes that were begun here in the United States are now being driven by people from India and China. A hundred years ago, weren't we sending missionaries to India and China to help them both find Jesus and also develop economically and politically – to be more like us? Our efforts have apparently been really successful because now we're feeling competition from them.

There is opportunity in the new flat world. There sure is opportunity for justice on a level playing field. What are the possibilities and opportunities for bringing justice and sense of world consciousness? Small companies and individuals are able to compete more equally with large corporations. Third world countries are competing successfully with first world countries. There are still many injustices, but opportunities are present. Voices crying in today's marketplace represent new ideals, strategies, and technologies. They also represent real fear, real change, and the loss of jobs. At the same time, there are new possibilities for jobs. Amid the furor of these voices, the Spirit is inviting us to hear the soft voice of justice. We can hear. The world can hear if we will listen.

The vision I see is still fuzzy. It is not yet clear. We as followers of Jesus need to be supporting and encouraging possibilities for a more just world that are present in the newness. How to do that? How will we encourage justice? I'm not really sure. We, as individuals and as a church, have to find a way to enter the new playing field. We are awaiting the second touch of the Spirit. It might come as we talk about ideas and share ministry together. Maybe my second touch will come from you?

I'm beginning to see changes in Church. This is not just new ideas or theology. These are just symptoms. The real changes are much deeper. As the world changes, the church also changes. The world is changing in some deep and fundamental ways. The church is changing as it has changed in the past at the time of Constantine, with the Protestant Reformation, and with the Enlightenment. Again today, significant change is taking place in the Church -- maybe more radical than ever before!

What is the nature of this change? Dogmas and doctrines are being questioned. Traditions are being questioned. Sources of authority are also being questioned: the Pope, the Bible, and the Institutional church. In this new age of Christian faith, what do we have? Without dogmas, doctrines, and the certainty of the past, is there anything left? Our answers will determine if we do. (hint: Yes, there is. We have God -- not our image of God, but the reality.

We sing a song with the words, "Let your light shine on us." God created light and light reflects God. The nature of light, to those interested in quantum physics, is a bit of a mystery. One of Einstein's great contributions to science is the insight that matter comes, at a fundamental level, in particles. There are tiny particles with empty space in between them. Light, it seems, is likewise composed of individual particles and experiments have proven that it behaves that way. Other experiments, however, also demonstrate that light is a wave – not particular.

God's nature is reflected in the nature of light. God is like a wave – the vast and unknowable Ground of all being! This is the cosmic and "non-particular" God. At the same time, God is also particular – personal and being-like. We find God's nature to be whatever we are seeking at the time. Therefore, our theological debates about the nature of God, a personal being or a cosmic force, are moot. Above all, we need to respect each others faith journeys and take our own journey seriously.

I'm beginning to see new life for the church -- more connected to life around us and less isolated from the world. For our congregation, the challenge is to used are passions and gifts to aid in this connectedness. We need to find the ways to utilize our passion for social justice, music and theater, building community, and exploring theology to help share God's love.

In many ways, Christian congregations such as Crossroads have more in common with moderate and progressive people of other faiths than we do with fundamentalist Christians. The opportunities are here for us to work for *Shalom*, the globalization of the Spirit that can be found in worldwide connectedness. In a sense, we can begin to reflect what the Bible calls the *Kingdom of God!*

I'm beginning to see my life changing. The Spirit always seems to call us to follow the path less traveled and also to blaze a new trail. C. S. Lewis writes, in his book *Perelandra*, "The world is so much larger than I thought. I thought we went along paths – but it seems there are no paths. The going itself is the path." You and I hear the call from within ourselves to become new, to be born again

We are being called to discover what really brings us to life. We are challenged to find God's presence in our work, in our living, and in our lives, then to give ourselves fully to that work and that living. Former UN Secretary General Dag Hammarskold wrote a remarkable journal that was found after his death. It was called *Markings*. He wrote, "I'm being driven forward into an unknown land. The pass grows steeper, The air colder and sharper. A wind from my unknown goal stirs the strings of expectation. Still the question: shall I ever get there? There where life resounds a clear pure note in the silence."

Blazing trails is lonely work and we are often unsure of the direction. That's why we have each other, the community of the Spirit, the church. The vision I see is all of us on a journey, individually and as a congregation, "where life sounds a clear pure note in the silence."

Touch us and touch us again, Spirit of the Living God. Lift us up that we may see father. Touch our eyes that we may see more clearly. Touch our hearts that we may love you completely. Touch our whole selves that we may fly in Jesus' name. Amen.