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Mark 8:22-33

Healing Stories: "Seeing Clearly"

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A man is finally healed after Jesus does a double touch; a strange story unlike any other healing story in the Bible. At best, it looks like Jesus needed to try again and it hints at delay. At worst, it hints at incompetence.

Why did Jesus want to have a private moment with this guy? Did Jesus recognize he was feeling weak that day and thus knew he would need a second crack at it. Strange, he never needed two tries before. Was he thinking it was a possibility, and thus privacy was needed so a lot of people did not witness the redo. Or is this story not at all about Jesus inability to heal.

I think not. So then, what is it about? Could it be that the writer of Mark who alone tells this story of the healing of the blind man, has it here as an illustration of a point he is trying to make? Chapter 1-8 in the Gospel of Mark is trying to answer one question and one question alone: "Who is this man Jesus?"

In chapter 1 he answers the question four times. He answers it when John the Baptist says he is the Messiah. He answers it when God opens up heaven and declares Jesus is his Son. He answers it when Jesus says "The time is a hand; the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe the gospel. The question is even answered when Jesus walks from the temple and is confronted by the demons who say, "We know exactly who you are, you are the Holy One of God." Over and over again, Mark is attempting to answer this question. The only problem is that

no one seems to get it. No one seems to understand who Jesus is.

In the third chapter of the Mark we read how the crowd is fascinated; by the man who is doing all these wonderful things. They are convinced they should keep their eye on him. To religious leaders Jesus is an infuriating man who does a lot of frustrating things. They are convinced he is demonic. To his family Jesus is an embarrassing man. They are convinced he has gone insane, and thus we see them trying to take him back home by force. And then there are disciples, who of all people should understand, yet they do not know what to think about Jesus. They are confused, and it becomes more evident with every chapter that Jesus is the Messiah, and it seems with every chapter the disciples are more clueless.

In chapter 4, Jesus calms the sea, get into the boat, and the disciples look at him and say, “Who is this man?”

In chapter 6, Jesus feeds 5,000 people, walks on the water and meets them in the boat. They are terrified by Jesus power over the sea because they “gained no insight from the incident of the loaves.” They did not get any closer to understanding who Jesus is, even from watching him miraculously feed the 5,000.

And then we have chapter 8, an even more startling example of the disciples’ lack of understanding. Prior to our text for this morning, Jesus feeds 4,000 people. Remember, he has already feed 5,000 people in chapter 6. Thus, this is the second time they watched Jesus miraculously feed a multitude of people. He gets his disciples into a boat and then begins a teaching about the leaven of the Pharisees, which was meant to give them some kingdom/reign of God principles. But, they are not listening to him. They are distracted. Mark chapter 8 verse 16

says they are not listening because “they began to discuss with one another the fact they had no bread.

By now, they should have known coming up with bread was not a problem. Jesus had already fed 5,000 then 4,000 people. In other words, Jesus multiplies bread well. Let’s do the math, there are 13 in the boat and 12 of them could not concentrate on what Jesus was saying because they were so worried about the fact they do not have enough bread for their short trip.

The following verses show us Jesus was obviously not pleased with their lack of understanding. Actually in verse 17 he unleashes eight questions on them:

- Why do discuss the fact that you have no bread?
- Do you not yet see or understand?
- Do you have a hardened heart?
- Having eyes, do not see?
- Having ears, do you not hear?
- And do you not remember how many baskets full of broken pieces you picked up when I broke the five loaves for the five thousand?
- When I broke the seven loaves for the four thousand, how many large baskets full of broken pieces did you pick up.
- Do you not yet understand?

They were seeing like the blind man, people as if they are trees.

Can’t you feel the intensity, the echo of the questions ringing in the air, and a daunting silence that followed? The answer to Jesus final question, “Do you not understand?” is a No! They do not understand. They do not understand who he is. They appear to be completely blinded to the reality that they were in the boat with the promised Messiah. Then, we move right away into this strange healing story read this morning.

Yet, before we go there we must go to the climatic moment in Mark 8 verses 27-30. Scripture tells us Jesus was “on the way”. Yet, it is not just any way, it is the way toward Jerusalem. Jesus has turned his face toward Jerusalem, in other words, toward the Cross. This phrase is used in Mark chapters 8 to Mark 12 nine different times.

As Jesus and the disciples are walking, Jesus asks them, “Who are people saying that I am”? They answer, “Some say John the Baptists, some say Elijah, and others say you are one of the prophets.”

Notice no one says he is the Messiah. Why, because they were looking for a superhero who would come and destroy what they felt was their most oppressive enemy – the Romans. They were not looking for a servant who would die.

Jesus gets a little more pointed when he asks them, “Who do you say that I am?” Right out of the blue after the flash speed eight questions, Peter replies with equal speed saying, “You are the Christ.” This was a huge statement for Peter, and even more so, a huge statement for any Jew. What Peter was essentially saying was you are the Promised One from Genesis 3:15. “We believe you are the anointed One, you are the One we have been waiting for. We believe you are the Messiah (Hebrew for anointed one), the Christ (Greek for the anointed one).

All of the sudden, the disciples now see Jesus!

Like the blind man they see alright. Yet, all is not right. People look like trees. Clear seeing has not happened yet.

Yet, Jesus was not finished with that declaration of “you are the Christ”. No, after this declaration by Peter, he goes on to tell

his disciples in verses 31 and 32, that the Son of Humanity must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priest and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.

Jesus had never talked to them about his suffering before this time. It is only when they realize he is the Christ that Jesus begins to tell them he is going to suffer, be rejected and die. He states that three times in the chapters 8-10 in Mark. He is not trying to get them to understand that he is the Messiah. Jesus is trying to get them to understand what kind of Messiah he is.

Some of us have been told who Jesus is by someone who may or may not of got it all right. They were seeing trees too.

Yet, the point Mark is trying to make in this story is that we do not see Jesus clearly, if we think he is our divine bellhop to respond to whatever we ask by getting it for us. That is a limited understanding of Jesus as the Messiah, who then comes in on a big horse and mows down anything that we think is in our way. Who uses violence to try and straighten things out. They did not get the Messiah they wanted, they got the Messiah they needed.

This story of the twice touched before being healed is about us not settling for: it is just about the title we give Jesus and that's all that matters. Jesus seems to be saying there is more to following him and the life of faith than just knowing the proper address.

In being the suffering servant Jesus allows us to see others clearly. In accepting that path, and walking on the way to Jerusalem we are called to see people not as tree, not as objects for our use. But rather, we are called to see each other clearly,

as human beings, not to be used for our own needs, but rather there so we can meet their needs, even if it requires suffering on our part. We too get the Jesus we all need, not the Jesus we want.

Therefore, our healing comes when we realize what Jesus does, suffering in service. This is how we lose our lives. Suffering in service is how we gain not just clear sight, but our very own lives back, and in so doing, we gain the whole world.