

## JESUS CURES A BLIND MAN

Mark 8:22-26

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IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

Mark tells us one of the strangest healing stories in the Bible. Jesus and his disciples came to Bethsaida, a sea port town on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee. Some people brought a blind man to Jesus and begged him to touch him. He took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village (maybe to avoid curiosity seekers). Then Jesus did something *really* strange. He put saliva on the blind man's eyes. There's absolutely nothing medicinal, as far as I know, about saliva but many people in the ancient world thought otherwise. Then Jesus laid his hands on the blind man and, like an optometrist adjusting lenses, asks, "Can you see anything?" The man looks up and says, "I can see people, but they look like trees, walking." So ~~the divine optometrist tries another lens--he lays his hands on his eyes again.~~ The man looks intently this time. His sight is completely restored and he sees everything clearly.

Blindness was one of the great curses of the Middle East, caused partly by the pitiless glare of the sun, aggravated by the lack of hygiene. Blindness. The inability to see. How handicapped we are without good eyesight. Today, most of us are blessed with good eye sight. We have good doctors, good eye wear and good treatment for cataracts and other eye diseases. But people still lose their sight. What a loss it is. The piano player or organist no longer can see the notes to play. The person who loves to read is deprived of one of life's pleasures.

But there's something worse than physical blindness. Spiritual blindness is far worse. The inability to see God. Blind to our own faults when we see the faults of others so clearly. Jesus talked a lot about spiritual blindness. Jesus called the religious leaders of his day, "Blind leaders of the blind". He said, "Remove the log from your own eye before attempting to remove

the speck from your neighbor's eye." Just a few verses earlier Jesus upbraids the disciples for their spiritual blindness. Jesus says to his disciples, "Do you have eyes, and fail to see?"

Spiritual blindness prevents us from seeing spiritual reality. Have you ever notice how some see a miracle where others see only coincidence. Some people see God everywhere. Others can't see God at all. Remember the words of a Beatles' song. "He's as blind as he can be, Just sees what he wants to see, Nowhere man can you see me at all?" Spiritual blindness prevents us from seeing God in Christ.

Jesus healed blind people several times. In John 8, he healed a man born blind. Told him, "Go wash" in a pool and be healed. Jesus healed blind Bartimaeus begging by the side of the road. He healed two blind men on his way out of Jericho. Each time Jesus healed the blind, people remembered Old Testament Scriptures. The Psalmist wrote, "The LORD opens the eyes of the blind." The prophet Isaiah promised that God would come and, "...then shall the eyes of the blind be opened." Blind people were blemished, considered imperfect people, unworthy of membership in the people of God. Jesus restored the sight of blind people and enabled them to belong to the people of God.

In the four gospels there are about two dozen stories of healings. Some were healed at a distance simply by the word of Jesus. Some were healed with a touch. Still others were healed with a word and some other means like water, or mud or saliva. But the miracle Mark describes this morning is unique among all the healing stories in that the cure was gradual. A second touch was required to restore the blind man's sight completely.

Let's think about why Mark tells us a healing story that takes place in two steps.

First, notice that after Jesus touched the eyes of the blind man the first time he saw people as trees walking. He saw people as things. Sometimes husbands and wives, Christians

whose eyes have been opened to see their need of Jesus, fail to see one another clearly, treat one another as things rather than as people. "He sits there in front of the television and completely ignores me. I might as well not even be there." A second touch enabled the blind man to see people clearly. Many of us need a second touch to really see the people who love us.

Andrew just completed an education course at Temple University which attempted to make prospective teachers more aware of minorities. He had to choose a minority group and spend at least ten hours with them. He chose people suffering from "dwarfism," a genetic defect that prevents ordinary growth. He spent a whole day with several "Little People." He heard them speak of how people stare at them like they were things, objects, freaks rather than flesh and blood people who love and laugh and cry, who have hopes and dreams. As a result of his study his eyes were opened to see *Little People* as real people.

A second lesson. God will finish the good work he has begun in us. He won't leave us half finished. "Be patient with me, God isn't finished with me yet." Making a decision for Christ or joining the church doesn't enable us to see perfectly. No one sees all God's truth all at once. One of the dangers of some kinds of evangelism is that it encourages the idea that when we've made a decision for Christ we're full-grown Christians. One of the dangers of Church membership is that it can be presented in such a way as to imply that when a person becomes a member they see everything clearly. Baptism, church membership, a decision for Christ will mean very little unless we continually seek to see our Christian duty and responsibility more clearly.

Thirdly, God wants us to use the best medical means of healing as well as rely on God's healing power. Christians pray for healing but we also go to doctors and use medicine and undergo therapy. Jesus used saliva. Some of the treatments used in the past, like bleeding

people and pre-frontal lobotomies, seem as primitive to us as the use of saliva. And I'm sure that some of the treatments we use today will, in years to come, be consider primitive and ridiculous. Nevertheless, we should seek the best medical care available as well as rely on God's healing power.

A man came to me for healing. He was an alcoholic. He was also a deeply devout Christian. He prayed. He read his Bible. He cried out to God. And then he'd go out and drink. He felt powerless. He felt so guilty and depressed and worthless. I encouraged him to seek professional help. I offered to take him to a detoxification center. I wanted him to get counseling for his alcoholism. He refused. He didn't want to put his trust in human means. "I just need to trust Jesus more." I tried to show him how Jesus used means to heal people; how he used saliva to heal a blind man, how he told another man to go wash in water, but I couldn't convince him to use medical means to deal with his alcoholism. Jesus used saliva, perhaps to teach us to seek medical help when we're sick or sad and confused.

Friends, Jesus is hear this morning to heal our spiritual blindness. He enables us to see spiritual reality more clearly; to see people as men and women, rich and poor, good and bad, as created in the image of God and valuable. Next week we will celebrate the sacrament of Holy Communion. One of my favorite communion hymns reminds me of how much we need Jesus to heal our spiritual blindness.

*Here, O our Lord, we see You face to face.*

Ask the risen Christ to enable you to see more clearly. Come next week prepared to see the Risen Christ face to face in the broken bread and poured cup. Amen.