

**"I SEE MEN LIKE TREES WALKING."
Rev. Robert T. Woodyard
First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden
October 21, 2012, 10:30am**

Texts for the Sermon: Mark 8:22-26

Introduction.

Prayer: Holy Father, as I come now to this task of declaring your Holy Word, the word written and proclaimed by your Holy Spirit through your apostles, grant me their vision and power. My words are dull, my vision is dim, my power is weak. Lord, lift us up the heights, give us eyes to see and ears to hear what is eternal and glorious. Open our hearts to your heart. We really do want to see Jesus. We really do want to follow Him. Help us here and now. Amen.

Mark 8:22-23, Blind Man from Bethsaida.

Friends brought him to Jesus.

How good are your friends? Do you have any friends who can get in your face and tell you the truth even when you don't want to hear it? Do you have any friends that care about you so much they would do anything for you, even take you to get help when you don't think you need help?

And how good a friend are you? Have you ever loved someone so much that you have risked your relationship to tell them what they absolutely needed to hear? What greater act of caring and love is there than that? What better gift can be given to a friend or colleague or relative than some glimpse of our Lord Jesus Christ? Some Scripture, some truth, some insight, some explanation, some testimony of God's grace. To whom has God give you to turn on some light in their darkness?

A nameless blind man in the town of Bethsaida on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee had some friends who brought him to Jesus and they begged Jesus to touch their friend. We are not told of any faith on the part of the man, but his friends demonstrated their faith by bringing him to Jesus with the expectation that just a touch from Jesus would heal him.

Your faith, your prayers can bring others to Jesus and to His healing touch. Let you who are spiritual and who have spiritual eyes pray for those who are spiritually blind, that Jesus might touch them as He has touched you.

Jesus took him out of the village.

So Jesus reached out and touched him and nothing happened. Jesus took him by the hand and personally led him out of the village to a private place.

Often if we want a genuine encounter with Jesus we will have to escape from the noise, hurry and crowds, we will have to find a quiet place where we can hear the still small voice, a place where we can be uninterrupted and escape the distractions of daily living. And that's especially true any time we find ourselves in a blind alley or in a dark place.

Jesus spit on his eyes and laid hands on him.

Spit. What could be more foul and disgusting? Why spit? I wonder if it's to say that what comes out of Jesus' mouth is what brings healing and health and life. Does not faith come from hearing the Word of God?

Does not spiritual seeing come from spiritual truth which comes from the mouth of Christ?

Does not Christ break our pride by sending common men to preach common words to us and bid us believe and repent and be saved? Is it not also true that truth and salvation come from that Word which some of us once despised or hated or thought foolish or worthless? It seemed like spit to us at one time.

Mark 8:24-25, Blind man healed in two stages

If John Newton was writing a hymn about this text it might start, "I once was blind but now I squint" or "I once was blind but now I sort of see."

There's no way around it, this is a strange miracle. It raises several interesting questions. We know that a single touch or a single word from Jesus can cure completely. Is Jesus losing His touch? Is He running low on power? Before He has always been able to heal completely the first time, so why does this time take two healings?

Was it because of the man's weak faith, after all he didn't come seeking help, but was brought by friends? Did Jesus have to give him a glimpse to help jump start his faith and get him to desire more healing? Yet Jesus had healed others completely on behalf of friends or family.

Was this case extra hard as to give Christ greater difficulty in accomplishing the cure? If you wanted to argue for a difficult miracle I would be more inclined to point to an exorcism. At least there Jesus had to deal with very powerful, personal and willful forces of evil. But even demons can't put up any kind of resistance as we have seen. The creator of the universe would have no trouble with a small repair job like restoring sight.

Clearly Jesus has all power and there's nothing too great or too hard for Him. So Jesus' way of healing here was purposeful and meaningful. He chose this way for a reason.

Remember there is deep meaning in every single word our Lord spoke and in every action our Lord took. You can read and study and meditate on every word and action to great spiritual benefit if you are patient and willing to listen and learn.

This healing is meant by Jesus to be more than a miracle, it's ***also a parable, and a prophecy*** (Michael Card, *Mark: The Gospel of Passion*, p. 108).

Jesus does this miracle in the way He does to give instruction and to make a promise about the future. Who is this for? First, the disciples, and then us.

This story shows us how Jesus cures the blindness of a man in Bethsaida, how Jesus will cure the blindness of the disciples, and how Jesus delivers us from the darkness of our sin and being us into the light of His Gospel.

First, this healing reminds us Christ is completely free for all expectations and free from all preconceived notions. The man's friends expected Jesus to just touch him and he would be healed.

If Jesus had done every one of His miracles in exactly the same way what would have happened? We would have attached meaning and importance in the method, and not in the person doing it. We would have become fixated on the means and superstitious about it, rather than focused on the divine power of Christ. The outward means is nothing, it's Christ that matters.

I said a couple of weeks ago, don't begrudge Christ's ways, and what He does for someone else but not for you. Don't be jealous of other people's spiritual experiences and don't be puffed up and proud of yours.

Scripture is filled with a great variety of spiritual encounters and spiritual experiences, a burning bush, a talking donkey, a whale, a bright light on a road, a rooster crowing, a stranger who just happens to walk up.

And some spiritual encounters with Jesus even involve spit in your eye, are you OK with that?

The same Spirit operates but His power flows in so many ways, giving a rich variety of gifts and blessings. God is infinite and sovereign, His ways and His thoughts are way above and beyond ours. For some Christ pours out His grace richly and for others Christ gives His grace in measured drops, a little at a time.

Jesus will not be put in a box. He wants us to walk with Him by faith and to trust Him and His ways, especially when they don't make sense to us. What might seem backwards to us is forwards to God. God can accomplish the same purpose in a thousand different ways.

Jesus sometimes chose to heal in stages and that's still true today, He often chooses to heal in stages or degrees.

Second, this healing shows us that the conversion of a soul is a completely supernatural work and a completely spiritual work. Conversion is when a person in complete darkness comes into the light. Conversion is when a person completely ignorant of the truth begins to understand spiritual things.

Most newly converted persons don't see everything and understand everything all at once. We see dimly before we see clearly. We crawl before we walk and walk before we run. We see men as trees before we see men as men.

The person who understands this truth will be more humble about what he knows, more modest in his statements, and won't be afraid to say sometime, "I don't know or I don't understand."

Every conversion is a masterpiece, a one of a kind original custom made for each individual.

Third, this healing isn't just a picture of conversion. This is a picture of all of Christ's children even now and how we grow in our knowledge of God and Christ.

The people in the OT saw Christ only as a shadow, in the NT they saw Him more fully. And none of us sees or understands as fully as we will one day in heaven when we will see Him face to face in radiant glory.

There is much that is happening in us and around us that we don't fully comprehend or understand. Things can be a blur, events can seem so random, life can seem out of control, why questions abound.

But Christians take great comfort that the day of clarity is coming, the day we will see a great light and all will be made plain. Jesus will personally touch our eyes and we will see everything clearly.

The blind man came to see everything clearly with 20/20 vision.
The disciples would see everything much more clearly after the resurrection.
We will see everything even more clearly after our resurrection.

Let us comfort our minds and souls with the thought that we have only a little longer to wait. Let us be content to wait and watch and work and pray and remain steadfast in our pursuit of Him.

Jesus promises to be the author and the finisher of our faith. Jesus promises us that the day is coming when our spiritual eyes will be clear.

Philippians 1:6 And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

In His good time and in His perfect way He will bring to completion in each of us what He has begun.

Jesus asks the man, "Do you see anything?"

This is a strange question. In all of Jesus' other healing miracles the healing is immediate and very obvious. There never has been a need for any question.

Jesus asked the man what He saw for the sake of the disciples so they would get the parable and the promise.

This question connects this miracle with the previous incident on the boat when the disciples were rebuked by Jesus for having eyes but not seeing what He had done in multiplying bread. He begins, "Do you not yet perceive [see]? He ends that incident with a question, "Do you not yet understand?"

Jesus is letting the disciples know that while they are still blind and not yet perceiving, they will be able to by the continuing touch of Jesus. Jesus is moving them from blindness to sight.

The man's slow progressive healing might be a mirror to the disciples' slow progressive, growing understanding of Jesus. Their eyes are being opened slowly, step by step.

They will grow from non-understanding, to misunderstanding, to complete understanding (Mark 15:39; James Edwards, *Mark*, p. 245).

It's by grace that the spiritually blind begin to see. At first that grace may seem small, but by faith that grace grows. It's by grace that we see anything at all, and it's by grace that we see increasingly clearly.

Application and conclusion.

Permit me two closing applications.

If you can see Jesus ever so faintly and believe and trust what you see, you will be saved. But there's beauty in the details, there's beauty in knowing Him more fully, in understanding who He is and what He is like and what He does and how He does it. There's beauty when things come more into focus. There is much to be known and understood if you ask for more sight, if you ask for more clarity, if you press in and study and learn and pray.

It's like the difference between the person who hurries through an art museum glancing at famous paintings, and a person who sits down and studies the contours, the light and shadows, the expressions on the faces and the details in the landscape.

Some people only know enough of the Jesus of Christianity that they can't tell any difference between Him and the Jesus of Islam. The Jesus of Islam is a heresy and a lie and to think there's no difference is to be very myopic (nearsighted).

And guess what, folks, the Jesus of Islam is the same as the Jesus of Mormonism, another heresy and another lie. Those who think there's no difference or say Mormonism is just another Christian denomination, are not seeing well and have not looked closely at Christ and seen Him in the details of true doctrine.

I don't know what Billy Graham's son Franklin Graham was trying to do or say this past week by removing Mormonism from their list of cults on their website, but at the very least it's misguided and has led to a great deal of confusion and misunderstanding. Mormonism is a cult that denies the Trinity, the deity of Jesus, and the sole authority of the Bible.

Now I know that there will be someone who leaves here today saying Pastor Robert said don't vote for Governor Romney. I did not say that. I'm not making a point about politics or who to vote for. I am making a spiritual point about seeing Jesus for who He is. However we vote, we must be able to vote without being blindfolded to the truth (which it seems the BGEA has chosen to do).

A Christian can vote for Romney as long as they see clearly the difference between Christianity and Mormonism. We are not voting for a pastor, we are voting for a president. A vote for Romney is not a vote for his views on Jesus. It's a vote for his political agenda and how well we think he will uphold the constitution and fulfill his public office.

My point is that we must see Jesus more clearly than ever in this day and age.

Can you imagine the blind man answering Jesus question, "Yes, Lord, I can see. Before I couldn't see anything and now I can see things. Before it was all dark and now I can see some light. It's not perfect, but it's something, thank you. I might have hoped for more but I don't want to complain either, thank you. If this is all, it's good."

Don't be surprised if Jesus takes you outside of the village, outside of your comfort zone, away from the distractions and busyness of your life to do something new. And don't be surprised if He spits on your eyes. He may surprise us with His unorthodox ways. But here's the question, which would you rather have, the predictability and comfort of your current blindness or the risk and adventure and glory of new vision. I want to see more and if He has to spit on me, so be it.

It's a supernatural, spiritual work. You can't do it. You have to ask Jesus. No, you have to beg Jesus. Not because He's dull or insensitive, but because He wants all our heart. Beg Him with all your heart, with earnestness, for He delights to reward those who earnestly seek Him, who are not casual about their faith, but desperate. Without praying and asking we will remain blind, ever seeing without seeing. I want to pray for you know that you will want to see more of Jesus and that you will see more of Jesus.

Prayer:

Ephesians 1:17-19 May the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, 18 having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, 19 and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might