

Mark 8:22-38
Drop By Drop
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1-29-17

There is something that happens around our house; maybe it happens in yours, as well. You're listening to a catchy song and singing along. And you come to that line in the song—and you know exactly where I'm going with this—and you sing it out only to have your spouse look at you confused. “What did you just say?”

This happens to me on a weekly basis. Just ask Amy; she'll give you some of my greatest hits. My favorite example of this, a few years ago VW aired a 30 second commercial of people singing the wrong lyrics to Rocket Man. Burning up this place with cheap cologne.

We've been in a series of messages called *Eye Opening*, looking at the stories of Jesus through the human eyes of his most passionate but clumsy disciple Peter. Sometimes we just get the lyrics wrong, sometimes we have selective hearing. Like that line from the movie *Wayne's World* (I know, I'm reaching deep for these), where Garth turns to Wayne and says, “It's like you only hear what you want to hear.” And Wayne responds, “Thanks, I like to keep it short in the summertime.”

This morning's passage is the account of Jesus performing a miracle for a man who is blind. Restoring sight to blind eyes is a red thread that weaves its way through Mark's Gospel. And whether the darkness is physical blindness or whether it is a spiritual blindness, we all have things in our lives we miss because the light is not in us, blind spots if you will.

Now by nature, blind spots are hard to see...because we're blind to them. Have you ever been driving down the highway and start to change lanes only to realize there was someone camped in your blind spot? It's startling, right? Well, if we look at this miracle, Jesus giving sight to the blind man, in isolation, we risk putting blinders on and thus missing the fullness of what these verses want to teach us.

Hang with me for a moment while I give you a little bit of context. In the verses immediately preceding ours, Jesus has just come off one of his major victories. In Mark 6, Jesus and his disciples feed 5,000 hungry people, and not two chapters later 4,000 more stand before them hungry, and the disciples again look at him like, “We're shanghaied here, Jesus.”

Turns out the disciples have short memories. Isn't it interesting that they just fed 5,000 hungry bellies and now they're worried they won't be able to feed the next group? How many times do we see examples of God being faithful in our lives, only to worry the next time that the well has run dry? It's like we get spiritual amnesia.

Then in verse 10, Jesus puts them in a boat and takes them out for a little small group instruction. And again, they forgot to plan for supper. “What will we do? We didn't bring any bread.”

Jesus: “Are you guys serious right now? Tell me you're joking. Ok fellas, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod.”

Then they look at each other and say, “He’s upset with us because we didn’t bring any bread.”

“You guys, enough with the bread already. We just fed 9,000 people, and this is what you’re worried about?” Put a pin in that one. That’s the first bookend.

Now after they cross over the sea in verse 27, Jesus asks Peter, “Who do you say that I am?” And Peter answered, “You are the Christ.” But no sooner than Peter gets the answer right, he is sent right back to the back of the class because he wants to prevent the Messiah from going to the cross. Peter doesn’t realize that the most important thing Jesus will do, what he came to earth, in fact, to do, was to be the atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world—and die on a cross. But the disciples can’t see.

We grasp at all sorts of straws when we can’t see clearly. But the grace and the mercy of this passage is that even while we fumble around in our blindness, Jesus sticks with us. Lamentations 3 says that **the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.**

Here is where we come to the beauty of this passage. Whether our blindness is of the spiritual or physical type, Jesus’ compassion stays with us. Even if the first effort doesn’t do the trick, Jesus’ tenderness stays with us.

They came to Bethsaida. Some people brought a blind man to him and begged him to touch him. He took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village, and when he had spit on his eyes and laid his hands on him he asked him, “Do you see anything?” And he looked up and said, “I see people, but they look like trees, walking.”

I love the earthiness of this, the disregard for a sanitized spirituality that Jesus displays. He’s not an aloof, detached sage. No, Jesus spits on his eyes. Laying hands on him, he asks, “See anything yet?” “Sort of, but things are pretty fuzzy.”

This is the first experience of revelation. When God comes into our lives with transformation, things can look a little fuzzy as we rub the sleep out and open them for the first time. I can see, but everything looks a little strange.

How many of you have ever entered into something new—a job or learning a new skill—and had that moment of disorientation? Better yet, how many of you, after discovering that person for whom you believe God put you on planet earth to love and cherish, came out of the gates with a perfect relationship? I mean, even though you think God set this world a spinnin’ for just such a moment, things are clumsy at first.

But what I love about this moment between Jesus and the blind man is that Jesus doesn’t stop there. Jesus doesn’t leave him in his blurry-eyed state. Jesus stays with him, seeing him through his journey to sight, from darkness to light. The Reformer and Father of our particular wing of the Family of God, the cantankerous old crank John Calvin, puts it beautifully: “The grace flowed upon this man drop by drop.” Drop by drop, that’s how most of us receive God’s grace. Slowly, with Jesus by our side, we are freed to see what we have not seen.

This is why we call it conversion; things do not often transform without some sort of process. And so it is with us. Becoming the people God created us to be doesn't happen all at once when we accept Jesus as our Lord and Savior. Does it mean that we are welcomed into that saving, atoning work of his miraculous act on the cross? Yes. Does it mean the story is over? Not by a longshot.

We are converted by seeing the grace of God that comes to us drop by drop, day by day, experience by experience. That takes time, time to forgive, time to sit in the tension of our brokenness in the presence of an ever gracious God; time to learn patience, tenderness, generosity; time to learn how to shed our preconceived notions about one group or another; time to learn how to love those who are different from you; time to learn that the God we worship will not be coopted by one political party or another; time to learn that Jesus' number one commandment is do not fear—do not fear the scarcity of not having enough, do not fear persecution for doing what is right; do not fear the possible consequences for listening to the Bible's call to stop at doing what is right and walking humbly with God.

It's fitting and worth noting that the Old Testament passage for today in the Church's Lectionary Calendar is from Micah 6, the very same passage that is written on street looking view of our Church sign: **He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?**

You know, when I was about 25, my grandfather, the late Rev. Dr. Lester Archibald Dahlen, Missionary to the Orient, ordained Lutheran clergy for over 65 years, husband, and father of three was remarried at the tender age of 88. Just a few years prior my grandmother, who we called St Marian—saint because she put up with my grandpa for as many years—lost a valiant fight with cancer. Let's just say that in my mother's family, Grandpa did all the Pastor'n and Grandma did everything else. She really was a saint.

His new wife Irene—Reeny as we liked to call her—was, shall we say, a little less traditional in her views on gender roles. On our very first visit over supper, we sat down, Grandpa stood up and asked my mom, “Barb, can I get you something to drink?” He then proceeded to go over and pull the roast out of the oven. What?!?! Who are you and what have you done with my grandpa?

It's not that this old dog had learned a new trick, but that there was still a little more conversion left in his story, a little more mercy, a little deeper grace, a little richer relationship, drop by drop by drop.

Sometimes, Jesus disrupts our routines, our norms, to take us away to a new place to show us a new side of our story, the one we've yet to live. Now sometimes, that's not the most comfortable place in the world to be. But as we like to say in our house, never waste a good crisis. Because, like the monarch emerging from the cocoon, it's in the struggle where we develop the strength and trust to become who we were created to be.

Moment by moment, struggle by struggle, drop by drop.