

2 Lent B
Half-Blind Followers

February 24, 2024
Mark 8:31-38

If you've watched many of the Three Stooges shows, you have probably seen Moe poke Curly in the eyes. Then Curly, gropes around yelling, "I can't see! I can't see!" Moe would ask, "Why not?" Curly answers, "Because I had my eyes shut!" Sometimes people choose to be blind by keeping their eyes shut. Some people cover their eyes during a movie so that they don't see scary or gruesome scenes. Blindness, not seeing, not understanding, is a theme throughout chapter 8 of Mark.

A few verses before our Gospel text, Jesus asks his disciples, Do you have eyes and fail to see? Do you have ears and fail to hear? And do you not remember?¹ The grammar of the Greek expects an answer of, "Yes, we have eyes and fail to see. We have ears and fail to hear. We do not remember." Two verses later, after a bit of teaching, Jesus asks: "Do you not yet understand?" Again, the Greek grammar assumes an answer of, "Yes, we do not understand." The disciples suffer from a type of blindness that keeps them from seeing and understanding.

Right after that question, a blind man is brought to Jesus. They beg Jesus to touch him. Jesus takes him by the hand and leads him out of town. He puts saliva on his eyes. He lays his hands on him. He asks, "Can you see anything?"

The man looks up and says, "I see people. They look like trees walking."² He sees better than he did. He is no longer blind, but his sight is not perfect.

Jesus lays his hands on his eyes again. After this it says: "His sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly."³ I might add: this miracle story is only found in the Gospel of Mark. I think it's a key theme for the whole gospel. It is possible for the blind to see again – but it might take more than one touch from Jesus.

Immediately after this miracle, Jesus asks his disciples, "Who do you say that I am?" Peter answers, "You are the Messiah."⁴ Peter **sees** who Jesus is.

Then comes our text. Jesus began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes and be killed and after three days rise again. While this teaching is found in other gospels, only Mark adds: "He said all this quite openly."

Peter takes Jesus aside – or the word can also be translated, "grabbed him" – like grabbing lapels if Jesus wore a suit coat. Either way, Peter tries to stop Jesus. He gets in his way. It isn't because Peter didn't understand what Jesus said. It's because Peter did understand Jesus words – and he didn't like what he heard. He can't **see** why Jesus must suffer, be rejected, and die.

Somewhere I got this quote from Mark Twain: "Many people are bothered by those passages in Scripture which they cannot understand; but as for me, I always noticed that the passages in Scripture which trouble me most are those which I do understand." Peter was bothered by what he did understand.

Peter is like the blind man after one touch. He sees better than he used to, but he doesn't see clearly yet. He can't grasp the suffering, death, and resurrection that the Messiah has to do.

¹ Mark 8:18

² Mark 8:24

³ Mark 8:25

⁴ Mark 8:29

He is a half-blind follower of Jesus.

Right after our text comes the transfiguration which we heard a couple weeks ago. Peter, James, and John **see** Jesus in all of his shining white with Moses and Elijah. They clearly **see** Jesus in all his divine glory, but Jesus orders them to tell no one what they have seen until after the resurrection. They will not see the whole picture until after his death and resurrection. Until then, they are half-blind followers.

A character in Mark who sees clearly is the centurion. He **sees** how Jesus dies and exclaims: "Truly this man was the Son of God."⁵ To properly **see** Jesus, one must see the bloody corpse on the cross. Only then can one fully **see** what it means to follow Jesus.

It's not seeing the miracles, nor the glorious Jesus on the mountain that leads to proper understanding; but Jesus, dead on the cross. That's the depth of God's love for us. That's the measure God goes through to bring us salvation. Jesus becomes our sacrificial lamb who takes away the sin of the world.

How many people have you heard say, "I became a Christian because I wanted to take up my cross?" Or "I became a Christian because I wanted to lose my life?" Or "I became a Christian because I wanted to suffer pain and rejection and humiliation and ridicule." Yet that's what Jesus says it takes in order to follow him. It's seeing that saving my own life comes through giving up my life – trusting Jesus for my future rather than trusting myself.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a Lutheran pastor, who was killed in Germany in 1945 for opposing Hitler, write: "When Jesus calls you, he bids you come and die."

Jesus doesn't make any logical sense. You gain life by giving it up. That's what we are supposed to see. Does it make any sense that spit and a touch could make a blind man see again? Does it make any sense that the Son of God would save the world by giving up his life, by suffering and dying on a cross? Does it make any sense that a man who had been dead for three days could suddenly rise up and walk out of his grave? It takes a miracle of new sight for us to believe in Jesus. As a convert from Islam said about Christianity, "It's so absurd it has to be true."

The apostle Paul writes: "Now I know partially, but then I will know completely in the same way that I have been completely known."⁶ He is a half-blind follower of Jesus. He recognizes that he is unable to see everything clearly now; and that's all right.

We confess our faith in Jesus. We once were blind, but now we see; but we do not see everything clearly. We have unanswered questions about Jesus, our faith, God, why Jesus must suffer and die, how do we lose our lives for Jesus' sake to gain it? Even Paul admits that he doesn't know it all – and that's OK. We aren't saved by understanding it all. We are saved by the touch of Jesus who comes to us and touches us in bread and wine this morning. We are no longer blind, but we are also waiting to see clearly. Like Peter, we are half-blind followers of Jesus; and that's good enough.

⁵ Mark 15:39b

⁶ 1 Corinthians 13:12b