

September 16<sup>th</sup>, 2018

Mark 8:22 – 9:1

Rev. Sharon Smith

**I once was blind but now I see.**

**Objectives:**

- Honouring the phases of spiritual seeing, the slow maturing of Christian faith
  - Uncovering the affronting vision of Jesus that is about weakness, giving up and surrender
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How could I be so **blind**?

I didn't **see** that one coming!

I **see** things very differently now.

**I once was blind but now I see.**

In our everyday language – we regularly use metaphors about **seeing**.

Particularly when we try to describe moments of:

Opening up, growing awareness, or broadening our horizons.

As disciples of Jesus, we are constantly being led into moments of revelation.

- of new discovery - of uncovering.

It's like what was there all along, suddenly our eyes are opened to and we see it.

**I once was blind but now I see.**

In our text, Peter has a moment of new discovery.

Jesus reveals another layer of his identity.

He further opens his disciple's eyes.

And by Peter's kneejerk rebuke, we can tell that this new vision is profoundly unsettling.

Mark who authored this Gospel, nestles this moment between two stories of blind men having their sight restored.

We read one of them today.

**A blind man, touched once by Jesus receives partial sight.**

**Touched twice he gains full clarity.**

**I once was blind but now I see.**

Mark is writing as one steeped in the tradition of the prophets.

He draws on the poetic language of Isaiah writing about Hope (Isaiah 29: 18)

<sup>18</sup> On that day ... out of their gloom and darkness  
the eyes of the blind shall see.

Mark uses these healing stories as metaphors to look back on a moment of insight.

This moment of growing awareness of Jesus' identity.

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**So would you allow me today, to draw 3 parallels:**

- **between the blind man receiving his sight;**
  - **the Apostle Peter's growing in his awareness of Jesus; and**
  - **our spiritual phases of growth?**
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If we could see the full picture of the life of faith when we first begin, it would be so overwhelming. So just like the healing of the blind man with two touches, God also graciously opens our eyes gradually.

Franciscan priest and spirituality author, Richard Rohr describes the spiritual phases of growth - how people's eyes are gradually opened through their lifetime.

*Falling Upward: A spirituality for the two halves of life,*

He says that on the spiritual path, there are two major phases.

- The first is the phase of building a strong container or identity.
- The second is to find the contents that the container is meant to hold.

Immersed in the first phase of identity formation we build our container by – gaining independence, accruing visible successes and accomplishments - like large houses, careers, families - we are self-determined, and focused on attaining a sense of security. These familiar and habitual ways are so reassuring that many settle for them.

And from this place, we come, partially sighted if you will, to God, - asking for God's support for our vision of living. We are at the center. We are ego driven.

And we see God, as One who supports us.

And just like Peter, who imagined Jesus as his saving Hero.

The Strong Mighty One who would save the Nation of Israel from Roman captivity.

We take Jesus aside and we instruct him on what we think he should do for us.

YET What Jesus was doing, was opening up for Peter, a different way of seeing.

**Just like the second touch of the blind man's eyes, Jesus touches Peter's spiritual eyes for the second time.**

**So that he could gain full clarity.**

Jesus had touched his eyes once – and he affirmed that Jesus was the One they were waiting for. The Messiah, the Christ.

But Peter's vision of the Strong Mighty Messiah needed a second touch.

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With this second touch, Jesus reveals or uncovers the way of his kingdom,  
Not a way of strength but a way of weakness,  
Not a way of success but a way of suffering,  
Not a way of making gains, but a way of giving up or giving over.  
What a contrast to Peter's vision.

And Peter became upset and unsettled.

Took Jesus aside and rebuked him.

You see my friends...

“Before the truth sets us free, it tends to make us miserable”.

*Richard Rohr*

Peter was locked in a way of seeing.

And we cannot force ourselves to see differently. This requires a Spirit moment.

Like it did, for the man born blind.

There is a beautiful description in First Century literature of what it meant for Jesus to rub saliva on the blind man's eyes.

Saliva was known as the condensation of spirit...

A spirit touch, in order to see.

**So like the blind man, and like Peter, we need the grace of a spirit touch to see more clearly.**

Here's another example.

Remember Saul on the road to Damascus. He was sure of himself, mission focused, competitive, violent and strong... self-sufficient.

And then he encounters something of the risen Christ in a blinding light.

And after this vision, he couldn't use his physical eyes.

It took a second touch from a devoted Christ follower to further open up his eyes.

The story is told beautifully by Luke in the Acts of the Apostles:

17 Ananias went his way and entered the house; and laying his hands on Saul he said, “Brother Saul, Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” 18 Immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he received his sight at once; and he arose and was baptized.

Peter, Paul and us. We all need a second touch. A spirit touch. One that dismantles our egos.

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According to Richard Rohr, once we have built our identity and ego, we need something to happen to us that is outside of our control, that is not of our doing.

A Damascus experience that renders us blind.

For only then do we experience our own weakness.

Only then do we come to the end of ourselves.

It's a giving up process. A surrender.

Following Jesus, in the way of giving up power,

dying to the things that we have lived for,

and receiving the gift of newness.

Of resurrection.

“Anyone who wants to save her life, must lose it. Anyone who loses his life will find it”

Denying ourselves is language, not of self-deprivation or self-neglect.

But it is a way of seeing:

- where we no longer desire to be like God.
- And instead let God be God.

We open ourselves up to follow a path where we do not control the outcome.

A path of surrender and trust...

For me it's been the moment I became aware of my white privilege in the midst of the South African Apartheid system and when...

I left my home country, my family and said yes to living in Canada; and

Then the sudden death of my partner, Alex; and

More recently the surprising change of career paths midway – a letting go.

What have the moments been for you?

Where you opened up to follow a path where you were not in control of the outcome?

No longer able to build up security for ourselves?

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***Irish poet David Whyte puts it this way:***

Just beyond  
yourself.

It's where  
you need  
to be.

Half a step  
Into  
self-forgetting  
and the rest  
restored  
by what  
you'll meet.

There is a road always beckoning.

When you see  
the two sides  
of it  
closing together  
at that far horizon  
and deep in  
the foundations  
of your own  
heart  
at exactly  
the same  
time,

Jesus touches a blind man's eyes for the second time.  
So that he could see clearly.

Jesus touches Peter a second time...  
So that he could see the way he had to go.  
To surrender strength and control, lose the life he thought he would live.

And to follow the One who is our way and our life;  
we too are called... just beyond ourselves... again and again.  
**For I was blind and now I see. Amen**

that's how  
you know  
it's the way  
you  
have  
to go.

That's how  
you know  
it's the road  
you  
have  
to follow.

That's  
how you know.

It's just beyond  
yourself,  
it's  
where you  
need to be.