

## Faith

“You can’t depend on your eyes when your imagination is out of focus.”

So says that famous author, and agnostic, Mark Twain.

It’s the same point that another Mark, the author of Mark’s gospel, drives home this morning.

Two weeks ago, we visited with the rich young man who comes running up to Jesus looking for the way into life.

He leaves with his head hanging low because what he owns actually owns him; and he can’t bear to change that relationship.

Last week, two of the twelve approach Jesus, and respond to his question:

“What do you want me to do for you?” — with requests for power and glory.

And here we are today, with Jesus continuing his journey on the way, heading into and then out of Jericho, the last stop before confrontation and conflict ... and crucifixion ... in Jerusalem.

Someone else approaches him today.

Not rich and young but poor and blind.

He throws away the only thing he owns, the cloak that serves as his blanket at night, his umbrella in the rain, his place to sit during the day.

His one possession, tossed away at once when he hears the call of the one he knows to be Messiah.

When Jesus asks him what it is that **he** wants, it's not to be seen, but to see; not to be followed, but to follow.

And while Jesus can't give places of honor away, he can give sight to this already insightful blind man.

The whole thrust of Mark's gospel, it seems, is to move us from sight to insight.

While those closest to Jesus can see, what they seem to lack, right up until the very morning of the resurrection, is insight.

Peter grabs him by the ear and hollers at him when he has the temerity to talk about a suffering and dying messiah.

And when he brings it up again, why, that's the cue for James and John to ask for their seats in the Super Bowl owners box!

Mark contrasts these closest friends of Jesus, these true insiders, by introducing us to some of the most unlikely outsiders, the hopelessly lost, the rejected and unwanted, who, amazingly, all display the insight that allows them to see Jesus for who he really is; even as his closest friends are half blind to what is standing right before their eyes.

Mark drags us within inches of the woman who is bleeding for twelve years.

She has no right to approach Jesus, much less touch him, for to touch him will make him unclean.

But she pushes through the crowd anyway, grabs the hem of his shirt; and he responds not with reproach, but with the same life changing words he utters today to Bartimaeus:

"Go, your faith has made you well."

Mark sits us down as the Syro-Phoenecian woman, a gentile, confronts Jesus on behalf of her possessed daughter: and refusing to take even Jesus' "no" for an answer, presses on until her need is met.

Mark brings us face to face with the desperate father who struggles to increase his own faith so that his son may be delivered:

"I believe, help thou my unbelief!"

Mark sets us alongside Jairus, the temple big shot, who resists the taunts of the crowd to give it up because his beloved little girl is already dead, but his insight allows him to stand there, hearing the most precious words ever uttered in his lifetime:

"Talitha cum - Little girl, I tell you, get up."

It is children and aliens and free lancing exorcists who show us what insight looks like, while the respectable folks stare at their shoes on the sidelines.

And each of these encounters is an abject lesson in faith.

"Faith is the rude insistence that this calamity be attended to — now!"

Faith throws off everything that gets in the way.

Faith leaps up and stands naked before Jesus - trusting that all will be well.

Only **this** faith, Mark tells us, can cure our paralysis, can cure our blindness." Jennings, *The Insurrection of the Crucified*, 175, paraphrased.

Speaking of radical faith, our own Stu Ching created some challenging meditations about the Corporal Works of Mercy, those revolutionary demands imposed upon all Christians.

Stu created his meditations to honor Fr. Damien DeVeuster and Mother Marianne Cope, saints who worked with Hansen's disease patients at Kalaupapa, saints who gave their lives to those ministries.

When Stu sent me his meditations, it reminded me about the Sacred Hearts High Schoolers who did a play about Mother Marianne a few years ago, right after she was named a saint..

People who saw the play were shocked at how tough this nun, now a saint, could be.

Some even complained that the play wasn't accurate.

But the good sisters from her community disagreed:

"Oh, that's how she was!"

She took no guff from government folks who tried to excuse the poor treatment provided to Hansen's Disease patients.

Fr. Damien was the same.

Walter Murray Gibson, the President of the Board of Health in 1883, had this to say about the future saint:

"He has written abroad representing the lepers as neglected by the government..

The Bishop is dissatisfied with him and says he obtains money under false pretenses...and now he disregards me and the Board of Health!"

And there is this by Fr. Leonor Foeusnel, Damien's Religious Superior, in 1887:

"He merits great praise for the sacrifice he has made of his life and liberty but unfortunately as this praise has come to him, he has swallowed it.

He has become intoxicated and now he is becoming dangerous!"

"Faith is the rude insistence that the present calamity be attended to — now!" Jennings, supra.

Today we are all mesmerized by the calamity happening south of our border as thousands of Central Americans, driven by faith, trek from homelands filled with drug violence and corruption and murder to what they hope will be a better life.

Whether that faith will be met with the open arms of our statue of liberty or with the hostile rejection of the current administration remains to be seen.

Will they be met with:

"Give me your tired, your poor,  
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,  
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.  
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me,  
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"

Or will they be met with the latest tweet from you know who:

"Full efforts are being made to stop the onslaught of illegal aliens from crossing our Southern Border.

People have to apply for asylum in Mexico first, and if they fail to do that, the U.S. will turn them away." Trump.

“What do you want me to do for you?” Jesus asks.

It’s a question that creates its own calamity.

Shall we jump in bed with James and John, seeking power and prestige, that prized seat in the owner’s box at the next Super Bowl?

Or shall we be like Bartameaus, who instantly throws away everything he has – and follows the Lord of Life?

So it is today that Mark urges us to focus not so much our eyes, but our imaginations; and, with imagination, come to marvel as Jesus turns relationships of power upside down.

As Jesus unleashes the paradox of losing life to save it.

Making the last first.

Transforming the slave of all into the master of all, as he subverts the world that we see, ushering in a new world – a world made visible only to those with insight.

Jesus, you see, is not about seizing power.

He is about transforming relationships.

Every relationship.

From the most intimate to the vast structures that form the foundations of our society.

Jesus invites us to join with those who are working “to build a new society within the shell of the old.” D. Day.

This is the journey from sight to insight.

It is the disciple's journey.

May your journey be blessed.

+amen