

SCRIPTURE READING FOR SUNDAY MAY 15, 2022 @ CAPC OAKLAND

Mark 8:22-26
COMMON ENGLISH BIBLE

²² Jesus and his disciples came to *Bethsaida*. Some people brought a blind man to Jesus and begged him to *touch and heal him*. ²³ Taking the blind man's hand, Jesus led him out of the village. After *SPITTING ON HIS EYES* and *laying his hands on the man*, he asked him, "Do you see anything?"

²⁴ The man looked up and said, "I see people. They look like trees, only they are walking around."

²⁵ Then Jesus placed his hands on the man's eyes *again*. He looked with his eyes wide open, *his sight was restored*, and he could see everything clearly. ²⁶ Then Jesus sent him home, saying, "DON'T GO INTO THE VILLAGE!"

LITERATURE AND PHILOSOPHY THAT INTERSECT WITH TODAY'S TEXT

Father Richard Rohr articulates an interesting theory on aging in his best-selling book *Falling Upward: A Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life*.

He explains the transition we all must undergo as we age from the first to second half of life via the story of *The Odyssey*. It's the sequel (in a sense) to *the Iliad*. Ulysses, who left home to fight in the Trojan War, seeks to return home. But when he returns home he discovers that his home has changed and he must change himself as well. Rohr's interpretation of the journey of Ulysses seems to echo the transformative promises and encounters in both Mark 8, Isaiah 35, 42 & Jeremiah 31.

Rohr writes that many older people find themselves stuck in the culture of the first half of life, where they continue to live by the values of fame and wealth. However, there comes a point when one must look inward to contemplate life and "discover your soul." "What is the normal goal to a young person becomes a neurotic hindrance in old age."

LANGUAGE NOTES & TEXTUAL CONNECTIONS

The gospel of Mark is thought to be the earliest written of the four stories of the good news of Jesus (Gospel means good news) which tells his life, actions, words, and mission. The main literary theory about the composition of Mark depicts the center of the gospel as the main teaching. This section may have been written down first as some sort of confession of faith, and then expanded to tell the story of the life of Jesus. This central section is Mark 8:22-10:52 – in which Jesus as a suffering messiah is presented. It didn't conform to the expectations of the Messiah. Curiously Mark places two healing stories of blind people who receive sight on either side of this revelatory section. One of these is our text today, the other is in Mark 10:46-52. The prophet Isaiah repeatedly talks of the time of the Messiah – or God's vengeance – or the Day of the Lord – as a time of reversal with the wilderness will bloom and the blind will see. While the beginning of Mark's gospel (from chapter 1 to chapter 8:21) contains many stories of Jesus miraculously healing people. But from here, 8:22, to the end of the gospel there are only three such stories – all in this section. Two of which are the healing of blind men. None of the other three gospels organize the order of the stories in this way. What then is Mark trying to convey by organizing his retelling of the story of Jesus with this emphasis on the blind gaining or re-gaining sight?

Notice the huge repetition in the text of words such as eyes, sight, seeing, blind....

Taking the blind man's hand, Jesus led him out of the village.. :: This is a traditional motif (or saying) that is often used in Biblical stories to indicate that something big is about to happen. Here in Mark it also has deeper reverberations as it echoes some Hebrew scriptures that talk of a new exodus, when God will lead the people of God to freedom, triumph and deliverance. See specifically these two scriptures

Isaiah 42:6-7

⁶ I, the Lord, have called you for a good reason.

I will grasp your hand and guard you,

and give you as a covenant to the people,
as a light to the nations,

⁷ to open blind eyes, to lead the prisoners from prison,
and those who sit in darkness from the dungeon.

Jeremiah 31:31-34

³¹ The time is coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and Judah. ...

LANGUAGE NOTES & INTERTEXTUAL CONNECTIONS

This same notion of having to leave behind a culture in which we live like goldfish swim in a bowl of water also intersects with the contemporary understanding of cultural supremacy, specifically white supremacy in our own country. NPR Reporter Eric Deggans writes that "As the world continues to sort through a racial and civil rights reckoning kicked off by police killings of Black people like George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, now more than ever, people want to know how to be anti-racist. To do that we have to first accept that we've all been raised in a society that elevates white culture over others. Being anti-racist will mean first challenging those notions inside yourself."

How do these ideas intersect this double-healing of Jesus who sends the man, now made whole, back to his home with the admonition to avoid what he's known before. How might Jesus be inviting us to return home and to not enter our own village as we do so....what village is that?

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION & EXAMEN:

- What engaged you, enraged you, or surprised you in these texts?
- Why do you think it take two times of touching the man for Jesus to heal his eyes, giving him sight? How does faith, or trusting, in Jesus change the way he sees? Why does Jesus tell him to return home, but to not go into (presumably his) the village?
- How do you long to see differently, or to see with new eyes? From what might you need to be healed and/or delivered to have such clear sight?
- What invitation do you hear the Spirit of God speaking to you – or to us, as a church – to act, speak, be or change through this word of scripture?

... .³² It won't be like the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt. They broke that covenant with me even though I was their husband, declares the Lord. ³³ No, this is the covenant that I will make with the people of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my Instructions within them and engrave them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. ³⁴ They will no longer need to teach each other to say, "Know the Lord!" because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord; for I will forgive their wrongdoing and never again remember their sins. my Instructions within them and engrave them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. ³⁴ They will no longer need to teach each other to say, "Know the Lord!" because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord; for I will forgive their wrongdoing and never again remember their sins.

to touch and heal him | laying his hands on the man :: In Christianity, the laying on of hands is both a symbolic and formal method of invoking the Holy Spirit. Here we see it as a gesture of healing. In the Bible is also is associated with the forgiveness of sin (Leviticus 1:1-4); the transfer and ordination of leadership.(Numbers 27:18, 2 Timothy 1:6); it's a physical embodiment of how God gifts us with healing, love, leadership and salvation (2 Timothy 1:6 and here). It's a embodying practice that the church continues to use today primarily during baptisms and confirmations, healing services, blessings, and ordination of priests, ministers, elders, deacons, and other church officers.

SPITTING ON HIS EYES:: In the ancient world spittle was thought to be a container of power, from the essence of a person. It was commonly used by "healers" to heal those who were sick and ill. We see this in other healing encounters with Jesus such as in (Mark 7:33) "³³ Jesus took the man who was deaf and could hardly speak away from the crowd by himself and put his fingers in the man's ears. Then he spit and touched the man's tongue." – and in - (John 9:6) "⁶ After he said this, he spit on the ground, made mud with the saliva, and smeared the mud on the eyes of the man who was blind from birth

his sight was restored :: the text tells us that the man had seen before and lost his vision. This story of physical blindness seems to speak to the natural human state of spiritual blindness from which only God can heal us.

DON'T GO INTO THE VILLAGE!:: Jesus tells the man to return home, but then to not go into the village. Does that mean to take a different path home, walking around the village in which he was previously known as a blind man? Wouldn't he have to go through the village to get home as the road probably went through the village? What is underneath this instruction of Jesus?