

LENT 2 2010: FAITH IN ACTION SERIES #2
Luke 4:14-21 / Mark 8:22-25

DO YOU SEE AS JESUS SEES?

INTRODUCTION:

Last Sunday, we began the season of Lent by reflecting upon how Jesus avoided demonic distractions -- while at the same time taught that we should always be ready and willing to take DIVINE DETOURS.

Today, we'll discover how to see those Divine Detours God places along our journey with Jesus.

And that's the thing for us to keep in mind -- not only as we move forward today -- and through Lent -- but throughout our lives -- **the life journey of every Christian is the life journey of Jesus Christ.**

And that's an important point for us to grasp. It's not that Jesus joins us along our path of life - - we fall into step and follow Jesus along his path.

And what Lent poignantly reminds us is that the path of Jesus leads to the Cross. It is a path of self-giving -- sacrifice -- disadvantaging self to give an advantage to others. How we view our relationship with Christ affects the way we see (or don't see) the world around us.

The scriptures reveal that all of us have a vision problem. Our sight is clouded by sin:

Farsightedness is the inability to see near things clearly.

Spiritually - that can mean we get excited about missions abroad, yet we don't see the pain in our local community.

Nearsightedness is the inability to see distant objects clearly.

Spiritually - that can mean we don't see or react to others "over there" (*those who aren't our immediate neighbors*).

Presbyopia is Greek for "elder eye" -- that's the condition those of us in our 40's & 50's get -- difficulty seeing things up close.

Spiritual Presbyopia happens when our compassion for others grows weak as we grow older.

Strabismus is the condition of the eyes being misaligned.

The ***spiritual equivalent*** is when we have our sites focused on worldly things.

There is an interesting passage from the Bible. It's not our primary text today, but it serves as an eye-opening illustration.

READ: Mark 8:22-25

This is an unusual passage -- in that the actions Jesus takes in healing the man are so different than any of his other miracles. ***Usually, Jesus simply speaks -- and it is done.***

Here, Jesus spits on the man's eyes, then touches him. Some have suggested what Jesus was doing was helping this man open his eyes because they had become matted shut.

When the man did open his eyes, he could see, but not clearly; he couldn't distinguish people from trees except for the movement. So Jesus touched him again, and then the man could see everything clearly.

So often -- ***many of us are like this man.*** We have met Jesus, and he has opened our eyes, but we still don't see people clearly. We all have a "lens" = assumptions, responses, and judgments that influences how we see the world and other people.

The scriptures say that Jesus looked upon others with compassion.

The word means "with passion" - or "sharing another's suffering or situation." And in fact, in the Gospels -- *except for the fictional character of the Good Samaritan* -- Jesus is the only person who looks at others with compassion.

We have given Jesus our hearts -- now, we need to give him our eyes.

HOW WE CAN SEE LIKE JESUS = SHARE HIS VISION:

Our primary text for the day helps us to learn why Jesus saw people the way he did, and how we can see like Jesus.

READ: Luke 4:14-15

We probably need to be reminded at this point that the passage of verses just before this one is about Jesus being tempted by Satan in the wilderness. (*last Sunday's lesson*) And what we need to remember is that several months of passed.

There are Bibles that are arranged in what is believed to be chronological order. The events recounted in John, chapters 2 and 3, seem to fall into this time period. And what John reveals is that Jesus had performed miracles (*water into wine*), healed people, as well as preached. So, that's why in these verses of Luke (14-15), it says, "news about him spread through the whole countryside" and "everyone praised him."

Jesus was starting to be widely known in the area.

Let's finish reading: READ Luke 16-21

Jesus has returned to his hometown - the town he grew up in. It's the Sabbath day; Saturday -- probably mid-morning. He goes to the synagogue -- which is what Jesus has been doing in other towns.

The synagogue is filled with people from Nazareth, and maybe others who are beginning to follow this teacher.

The men and boys are sitting on backless benches, and in the balcony are the wives, daughters, sisters. In the front of the room are a row of elders. One of them, an attendant, gets up. He speaks briefly. He then asks Yeshua Ben Yusef, (*Jesus, the son of Joseph*), to read the scriptures.

Jesus gets up, and walks to the middle of the room where there is a raised desk (*kind of like a podium*). People are excited to hear from him, because of all sorts of amazing stories have been circulating about this hometown boy.

The attendant carries a heavy scroll to the podium, and hands it to Jesus. It's a scroll containing the writings of the prophet Isaiah.

Jesus unrolls the large scroll until he finds the passage (*probably prescribed for that Sabbath*). There are no chapter or verse divisions -- but he comes to the passage that we call **Isaiah 61:1-2**.

And he then begins to read in a way that sounds different than the rest -- he reads in a way... that sounds like... a self-proclamation. He speaks the first line: "*The Spirit of the Lord is on me...*"

When he says this -- it doesn't sound like he is just reading something that was written hundreds of years ago. It sounds like his is identifying with it. In fact -- back at verse 14 -- it even says, "*Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit.*"

The Spirit of the Lord is on him.

"*because...*" Jesus continues reading the old words with new meaning...

"*...he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners, and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.*"

Jesus rolls up the scroll -- hands it to the attendant -- then sits down. Everyone is staring at him -- their eyes are fixed. You can hear a pin drop. He breaks the silence with these words, **"Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."**

Now, the silence is truly vanquished. What Jesus said set people buzzing -- because they knew that this passage applied to the Messiah!

Boldly, and with confidence, Jesus was saying that he was the One that Isaiah was writing about. **He was the Messiah.** And **this passage was his mission statement.**

This is how he **saw** himself.

This was how he **envisioned** his life and ministry.

His calling -- His purpose.

What was the Messiah's mission?

*Listen carefully - take notes - because **this is our mission too!***

1. Jesus' mission was to preach good news to the poor.

People thought that being rich was the certain sign of God's favor, and so being poor was the sign of God's judgment. Jesus said -- absolutely not. Jesus turned the tables -- the poor were given front row seats -- they were at the head of the line for receiving God's Good News. God's favor rested upon them. Whatever blessings would come forth from the ministry and sacrifice of Jesus would first be applied to them.

2. Jesus' mission was to proclaim freedom for the prisoner.

Whether you are literally imprisoned, or imprisoned spiritually, Jesus has come to set you free.

3. Jesus' mission was to give sight to the blind.

The blind were thought to be blind because of some sin they had committed (*or their parents committed*). The religious leaders figured they deserved to be blind. Jesus came to heal and show mercy to people who were physically handicapped, and spiritually condemned.

4. Jesus' mission was to release the oppressed.

Jesus came to set wrongs right. He came to help the helpless. He came to bring justice to those who experienced injustice.

5. Jesus' mission was to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

This is a reference to the OT year of Jubilee, when slaves were freed, and all debts cleared. Jesus came to proclaim that if you are enslaved by and in debt to sin, that you are free and all debts are paid -- because of what he would do on the cross.

Jesus' mission was a **people-focused** mission. It was an **outward-focused** mission. It was a **mercy and compassion driven** mission.

It was Jesus' **mission** that was the **basis of his vision**.

His **mission guided his vision**.

His **mission was the lens** that enabled him to see people the way he saw them.

People were Jesus' mission.

His lens was compassion.

FOR INDIVIDUALS/CONGREGATIONS:

AN OUTWARD FOCUS LEADS TO INWARD NEEDS BEING TAKEN CARE OF

This is probably the most difficult thing for many of us to grasp:

Having faith in Jesus Christ...

-- being a following of Jesus...

-- living together as the community of faith

-- being known as the Body of Christ in the world...

...means that the mission of Jesus is our mission, and the vision we have of what it means to be a follower of Jesus, and the church **comes from Jesus!**

That may sound pretty obvious, but it remains difficult to truly comprehend and incorporate into our life and our life together.

Here's how it usually plays out:

A pastor -- or a church leadership team -- lays out the vision for a congregation to reach out >

> to help those in need in the community & world

> to attract and share the Gospel with others

> to baptize new believers in Christ, and accept new members into the church...

Inevitably -- one of the first responses is:

We need to take care of our own...

There are folks on the roles that have become inactive, we need to reach out to them first.

We sure don't do that great of a job relating to and holding on the people who do come and join us....we need to work on our fellowship and people skills before you start telling us to move out into the community.

But, I am going to give it to you as straight forward as I can, folks...

Such inward focus is wrong-sighted.

The mission of the Church has always been the mission of Jesus Christ.

The mission of Jesus Christ has always been outward focused.

I'm sorry, but there is no way around it. The Gospels, the New Testament letters -- even when addressing internal issues within the church -- they are all focused on the mission Jesus gives: "Go! And make disciples."

Even when Paul is telling Corinthians how to act in worship and treat one another, and how to present themselves in public -- it is all for the purpose of proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ -- so others may come to know and have faith -- and live as Jesus lived.

Because here is the secret: *(and it applies to individuals as well as congregations)*

When you see the world and people with the eyes of Jesus - when you have an outward focus, the inner cares are taken care of.

Time again -- individuals going through the most trying of times give testimony that when they reach out to others -- give comfort and help -- they receive comfort and healing in their own lives.

It's the same with the life of a congregation. *(and I'm going to name names here...)*

Central Baptist gets thrown up as an example of congregational care and fellowship. Much is made about their social groups and friendship circles. And how they have 200 volunteers every Sunday that assist in providing high quality programs and classes.

And yes -- like any other congregation, they have their own challenges, and not everyone who has visited agrees with the pastor, etc.

But let's give credit where credit is due.

(See, I sometimes think church members don't think we pastors talk with each other about our congregations, and the ministries and programs we're doing.)

...So, having had discussions with the pastor at Central Baptist *(and I confess I don't agree with everything he says or does)*...

...what I will put before you is this:

The fact that they keep the outward focus of Jesus' mission before them is how they both attract and keep followers of Jesus Christ.

Here's the point *(so don't go away today thinking Madison wants us to be another Central Baptist)...*

When we see as Jesus sees people and the world -- things like caring for our homebound members, folks going through crisis situations, the deepening of friendships within the congregation.....

....These will all be taken care of.

If we are outward focused in our mission...

1. We will understand that everyone has a purpose and a ministry to fulfill. So we will recruit and insist that every member be involved in some sort of ministry. And yes, that might even be the ministry of contacting folks on a regular basis to see how they're doing.

If people feel that they have a mission and purpose within a congregation--they'll remain active.

2. We will see that how we act and conduct ourselves is also evangelism. My grandmother used to say, "If you don't have good manners at home, you won't have them when you're out." Reaching out to others doesn't happen out in the community, if we don't do it here.

So, yes -- even things like moving beyond our table cliques during fellowship meals...

And staying just an extra few minutes after Sunday services to greet and chat with one another... These actions take on great significance when we see that they, too, are about being outward focused.

3. We will grow closer to Jesus when we put aside political agendas, labels, and self-centered concerns. We are told by the Apostle Paul that our goal is to be remade into the very image of our Lord, Jesus Christ. Jesus didn't conform to the agendas of either the conservatives or the liberals of his day. Jesus looked beyond the social divisions of his culture. He had true compassion -- entered into the lives of others.

By doing so -- Jesus stayed true to the vision of God's Messiah -- God's Anointed One -- so that all the world might join him in God's favor.

What I'm preaching today isn't Pastor Madison's agenda. It's not the United Methodist Church's new strategy to keep and gain members. **This is the Word of God, folks.**

This is how we are to see our purpose and mission in life.

And it cuts me to the core of my being -- and convicts me as deeply as anyone here today.

You know -- life together as a congregation *is* about fellowship. It *is* about sharing meals -- going on trips together -- it's about looking after those who are homebound, sick, going through troubled times, and those who are dying.

But all those things aren't the central focus.

We don't begin our maturing in Christ by first looking inward. We seek to see as Jesus sees --- outward.

When we accept Jesus as our Savior -- we also accept him as Lord. His life and purpose - his mission -- becomes our own. And his purpose was never about being served -- but serving others. Jesus came to give his life for others; so that others (you and I, and everyone else in the world) might have life, and have it abundantly.

I am excited about our Lenten campaign, "Faith In Action"!

I pray that you will get excited, too. Because I know it is a means through which we can be about the mission of Jesus Christ. We can reach out to others in our community in the name and love of Jesus.

And selfishly, as your pastor, I am excited because I know that those who will participate as fully as they can -- they will themselves be ministered to.

If you feel disconnected to folks here -- this is an opportunity to connect through service.

If our current economic times have left you overwhelmed with concerns about your situation -- through this ministry to others your spirit will be lifted -- and you might just gain a different perspective that leads you forward into the future God intends for you.

If you feel like things are just fine the way they are -- try this....you might just gain a fresh, new perspective that adds a deeper dimension to your experience of life.

DEAD POETS SOCIETY> SEEING THINGS DIFFERENTLY

In the 1989 movie, *The Dead Poets Society*, Robin Williams plays John Keating, professor of English at an all-boys, prep school.

As he attempts to encourage the boys' appreciation and love for literature, he challenges them to see not only the writings of Walt Whitman and Shakespeare from a new perspective -- but also the world around them.

In one scene, he stands on his desk. He tells the boys, "The world looks very different from up here. You don't believe me? Come see for yourselves; come on."

The boys reluctantly, at first, move forward and take turns climbing up and standing on the desk. Professor Keating challenges them to take their time. He says,

"Just when you think you know something, you have to look at it in another way."

We think we know what the mission of the church is. Each of us comes with our own assumptions, our own personal preferences, our own judgments, our own expectations.

What we believe about our mission in the world affects how we see the world.

When looking at your world - what do you see?

A world in need?

A world worth saving?

A world worth serving?

You will -- if you are looking at it from Jesus' point of view.

When you see people, ask the same kind of question Jesus would ask:

"How can I help you?"

"How can I show you God's love?"

"How can I touch you with grace?"

"How can I bring healing into your life?"

"How can I help right a wrong?"

Divine Street UMC is very gifted. And there are many places where we can serve Christ by serving others as we continue to cultivate the gift of compassion.

This week -

- take a different route, and see the places and people
- spend some time with that co-worker, classmate, customer, neighbor that you normally just pass by or ignore.

Ask God to touch your eyes so that you can see others the way Christ does.

Ask the Holy Spirit to allow Jesus' mission to guide your vision.

If you can see people through the lens of Christ's compassion, you will discover practical ways to show them the love of Christ.

And you will experience the Spirit of Christ upon you.