

Do You Have Eyes But Fail to See?

Mark 8:11-21

Ernie Thompson

Westminster Presbyterian Church

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There is an old proverb that says, “*We do not see things as they are – we see them as we are.*”

And I think that’s true. Our expectations, our assumptions, our values, our priorities – they all shape what we see – and what we fail to see.

“*We do not see things as they are – we see them as we are.*”

During this season of Lent we are inviting you to think about the inward journey of faith – to think about how we grow in faith and in love.

And one important piece of this journey is our vision.

What do we see? And what do we fail to see?

Our Scripture lesson comes from Mark 8:11-21, a story about the disciples and the Pharisees who are both having trouble with their vision – they are having trouble understanding who Jesus is.

¹¹The Pharisees came and began to argue with Jesus, asking him for a sign from heaven, to test him.

¹²And Jesus sighed deeply in his spirit and said, “Why does this generation ask for a sign? Truly I tell you, no sign will be given to this generation.”

¹³And Jesus left them, and getting into the boat again, he went across to the other side.

¹⁴Now the disciples had forgotten to bring any bread; and they had only one loaf with them in the boat.

¹⁵And Jesus cautioned them, saying, “Watch out—beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and the yeast of Herod.”

¹⁶They said to one another, “It is because we have no bread.”

¹⁷And becoming aware of it, Jesus said to them, “Why are you talking about having no bread?

Do you still not perceive or understand?

Are your hearts hardened?

¹⁸Do you have eyes, and fail to see?

Do you have ears, and fail to hear?

And do you not remember?

¹⁹When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you collect?” They said to him, “Twelve.”

²⁰“And the seven for the four thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you collect?” And they said to him, “Seven.”

²¹Then he said to them, “Do you not yet understand?”

1. I read a book when I was in college by Thomas Kuhn called The Structure of Scientific Revolutions. It changed the way I think about science. And it changed the way I think about faith.

Kuhn says that science does not work the way we think it works.
We tend to think that science is just the linear accumulation of knowledge.
We have a theory. We test the theory. We prove it true for false, and we add that to the information we already know.

And that is the way science normally works.
But every now and then, Kuhn says, there is a revolution.
Someone comes along with a radically different way of understanding the world, an alternative way of viewing the facts.

Kuhn calls this a paradigm shift.
He's the one who introduced this idea of paradigms.
A paradigm is set of assumptions and expectations – a way of seeing the world. And normal science works within the existing paradigm.

But it's not just science. We all carry with us a paradigm, a set of assumptions and expectations.
We mostly don't even see our paradigms. They are the lenses through which we see the world. They are the water we swim in.
We assume that our paradigms are just the way things are – until a revolution comes along.

Kuhn uses the example of the shift from Ptolemy's model of the solar system to the one proposed by Copernicus.

Ptolemy assumed that the earth was the center of the universe and the sun and moon and planets all circled around the earth.
And that makes sense. It fits our experience. This paradigm was also useful. It helped predict the movement of stars and seasons.
If there were anomalies they were either ignored or the model was adjusted. But no one questioned the model.

And then Copernicus came along.
And he proposed a radical new idea, a very different way of seeing the world. Copernicus said that the earth revolved around the sun.
And at first everybody thought he was crazy. But eventually more and more people came over to Copernicus' way of understanding the world. And the paradigm shifted.

So, Kuhn says, science is not simply a linear progression as we accumulate more and more knowledge.
That's what normal science is, but every now and then a revolution comes along.
And then, we have to decide if we are willing to accept a radically different way of seeing the world.

And here's the problem. Not every revolutionary is right.
The tricky part is that often both paradigms can explain the facts.
And so, there is no immediate way to tell which model is right.

Kuhn uses this picture of a duck. Which is also a picture of a rabbit.
What we see depends on what we expect to see.

And it depends on how we interpret the details. So, is that the ducks bill, or is a rabbit's ears?

→ The main point for us is that our paradigm, our assumptions, shape what we see, and what we fail to see. And that's important, not just for science, but also for the way we understand Jesus.

2. Because Jesus comes to start a revolution – to invite people to a radically different way of understanding who God is and what God is doing and how God calls us to respond.

Our lesson starts with the Pharisees, and they have their paradigm, like we all do.

Their paradigm centers on God's law, God's instructions that he gave to Moses and the teachings of the prophets. And that's certainly a good place to start your paradigm, with God's revelation.

But that's not all they are doing – they're using their particular interpretation of God's law. But, of course they can't see that.

The Pharisees don't come to listen to Jesus or to learn from Jesus.

They come to argue with him and to test him.

They're looking for evidence to prove that they are right and he is wrong.

Richard Rohr describes what he calls the "dualistic mind."

It's a way of seeing the world that always wants to divide everything into just two categories – black or white, good or bad, right or wrong.

And there is some truth to this. There is some value in this. But there are also significant dangers.

Rohr says, "*Here is the normal sequencing of the dualistic mind: it compares, it competes, it conflicts, it conspires, it condemns, it cancels out any contrary evidence, and then it crucifies with impunity.*"

That sounds like the Pharisees to me.

It also sounds like many of the arguments we hear today.

And unfortunately, it sounds a little bit like most of us too. There is a little bit of Pharisee in all of us.

→ Jesus comes to undermine the Pharisee's paradigm and to show them a better way. But the Pharisees can't see it. So, they continue to compare and compete and conspire and condemn and eventually join in the cries of crucify.

3. Then we hear about the disciples, and they are also trying to figure out what to make of Jesus.

Jesus tells the disciples to watch out for "*the yeast of the Pharisees.*" But they have no idea what Jesus is talking about.

Jesus is warning them about the spiritual danger of the dualistic mind.

But the disciples hear something about yeast which is in bread and they know they didn't buy any bread and so they're worried that Jesus may be upset with them because they have no bread.

And unfortunately, this is the way our minds often work as well.

We jump from one thing to the next, and mostly thinking about practical things like where our next meal is coming from.

And we miss what God is saying and what God is doing.

I'm trying to do a little bit of centering prayer each morning, just sitting in silence trying to be aware of God's presence.

But I'm surprised how often I find myself thinking instead about what shirt I'm going to wear or what I'm going to have for breakfast.

Jesus, "*Do not worry, saying 'What will we eat? What will we drink? What will we wear?' It is those who don't know God who strive for all these things.*" (Matthew 6:31) I know Jesus is right, but knowing it and living it are two different things.

The disciples are also operating out of what has been called a "scarcity" paradigm.

They assume that there is not enough – not enough food, not enough love, not enough grace.

And again, it's not just the disciples. I think our culture teaches us this scarcity mindset in all sorts of ways. And if we live in this scarcity mindset we're always trying to get more – more stuff, more accomplishments, more accolades.

The irony here is that Jesus has just given them two dramatic examples of a very different paradigm – a paradigm of abundance.

Jesus asks them, "When I broke five loaves for 5000 people, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you collect?" And they say, "12."

And Jesus asks, "And the seven for the 4000, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you collect?" And they say "7."

With Jesus there is an abundance.

But the disciples cannot see it.

Jesus asks,

Do you have eyes and fail to see?

Do you have ears and fail to see?

Do you not remember?

Do you not yet understand?

And the answer is no.

They do not understand.

They do not remember.

They do not see.

And too often, neither do we.

➔ But this is not the end of the story. Eventually, Scripture says, their eyes are opened and they recognize him. Their paradigm shifts, and it changes them, and then they go out and change the world.

We do not see things as they are. We see them as we are.

But the good news is that Jesus comes to change both.

Jesus comes to open our eyes so that we can see. Jesus comes to change us, so that we can change the world.

This new vision and deeper change often comes through practice.

When I was running Cross Country in High School my coach told us that every day we were either getting faster or getting slower, and that depended on practice.

I know it's not quite the same in our spiritual life, but I wonder if there are some parallels. We're either drawing closer to God and becoming more and more aware of God's presence and God's love, or we are drifting away, and being less and less aware.

Now, this is not about attainment.

We're not trying to earn God's love or become a good person by practicing really hard.

It is about awareness. We just trying to open up space in our life so that we recognize God's love and grace that are already there, that are always there.

And so, in this season of Lent, we're inviting you to think about this inward journey of faith. And we're offering lots of spiritual practices for you to explore.

You'll see some of those in your bulletin.

Our Sunday Night classes in Lent are all focusing of different spiritual practices.

We've suggested some online devotionals that might help you start or deepen your daily prayer.

Quiet Spaces is a chance to experience the power of silence, and the Service of Wholeness and Healing will be a chance to bring our needs before God.

And of course, Sunday morning worship is a spiritual practice which can deepen our faith and change what we see. And during worship each week we'll be introducing a new spiritual practice during the time with children.

There are certainly lots and lots of other spiritual practices.

I'm convinced that mission trips and service projects are a powerful spiritual practice that change us and change what we see.

Retreats and Bible studies and small groups are can spiritual practices. I think friendship and caregiving and love are spiritual practices that change us and change what we see.

Each of us has to find what combination of spiritual practices works for our lives and for our personalities.

If you have 3 children under the age of 5, quiet contemplation may not be the right spiritual practice for you. Or it might be exactly what you need.

I talked to a doctor once who said when he was in medical school he didn't have time to pray. But that he decided he took a shower every day, so he could pray in the shower each day. And that helped him get through medical school.

Each of us has to find the right practices and rhythm that works for our lives.

"We do not see things as they are – we see things as we are." But the good news is that Jesus comes to change both. We open ourselves up to this transformation by finding the set of practices that open us up to God's Spirit.

And then we will truly see, and we will become the people God wants us to be.