

Sermon for Mid-Week Ecumenical Service – Open My Eyes, Lord

Mark 8:22-26 When they arrived at Bethsaida, they brought to Jesus a blind man and begged him to touch him. He took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village. Putting spittle on his eyes he laid his hands on him and asked, “Do you see anything?” Looking up he replied, “I see people looking like trees and walking.” Then he laid hands on his eyes a second time and he saw clearly; his sight was restored and he could see everything distinctly. Then he sent him home and said, “Do not even go into the village.”

“Six weeks till spring”, says the Groundhog. “Less than 40 days till Easter”, say the makers of Peeps, Cadbury Cream Eggs, and other candy. “Six weeks of Lent”, says the Church. All these ways of marking time! And what a blessing time truly is – like when we’re on vacation relaxing away in the company of family or friends. But is it just me, or does time sometimes feel like an enemy too. I’m sure a student waiting for the school bell to ring at the end of a long day would agree. Or again, if you’re giving something up as a sacrifice for Lent this year, you might already be thinking at this early date: “How many days without chocolate or dessert or coffee?” But, as Christians, we’re called not to see this time of Lent as a harsh desert of 40 days just to get through, but rather a time of allowing ourselves on a deeper level to acknowledge and see our brokenness, our sinfulness, and our need for repentance and conversion.

Now, we've all heard that word conversion before. Literally the word means "to change one's mind". In conversion, we see the sin we committed for what it is and then we change our minds about it – "that sin was a bad idea after all; it was wrong." In this way, conversion is often translated as "repentance", but with the important quality of making a decision to turn around. You get the idea – through sin we turn away from God, and so by conversion, or repentance, we turn back to Him. Now, two songs that I like very much render conversion like this. The first – and oldie, but a goodie – is *Simple Gifts*, which goes: "To turn, turn will be our delight, till by turning, turning we come 'round right." The other song is more modern by the contemporary Christian artist, Matt Maher. In his song aptly named, *Turn Around*, he sings: "If you're scared that you don't matter. If you're lost and need to be found. If you're looking for a Savior. All you gotta do is turn around."

It's through this process of turning around, or conversion, that our Jesus comes more clearly into focus – this Jesus, who can easily be obscured by sin. And seeing Him for who He is is meant to awaken within us a desire to be more like Him. But since we're formed out of the dust of the ground, as we recalled on Ash Wednesday, we are truly weak. And although our intentions may be the best, our wills are quite feeble and need to be strengthened by God's grace.

So whether we need to make a turn of 180° or just 5°, Lent is all about conversion – turning back to God. But the thing is turning takes time – it's a process. Have you ever spun around in a circle too quickly? You get dizzy! My brother and sister and I would love to spin each other around in my dad's office chair when we had to go in to work with him sometimes on Saturday mornings. Yeah, you get real dizzy if you turn too fast!

Now, our theme over the course of these Mid-Week Lenten Services is, “Open my Life, Lord.” It's all about Lent helping us let this Savior, who suffered and died for us, to be the Lord of our lives. We're invited to open ourselves to Him and let Him be the Lord of every single part of our lives – public, private, good times, bad. And all of this is a process. It's a *life-long* process of giving ourselves completely to the Lord. And so, over the course of these weeks, we'll focus on various aspects of letting ourselves open up fully to Jesus –opening our eyes to Him, and then our hands, our ears, our hearts, and our lives. Being completely converted to Him!

But, it all begins with sight – at least that's my topic and that's where we're beginning today. But, it makes sense – because, if we're blind, how are we going to see the way to conversion? And if we're spiritually blind – especially if we don't even know it – how can we follow *The Way* Himself?

Now, since I'm on a song kick today, I'd like to share with you a verse from a song I like very much by the artist, Jesse Manibusan. It's called *Open my Eyes*. The first verse goes: "Open my eyes, Lord. Help me to see your face. Open my eyes, Lord. Help me to see".

Now, I picture this song on the lips of the blind man from Bethsaida that we just heard about in our Gospel today – "Open my eyes, Lord. Help me to see your face." I've always found this passage particularly interesting though, especially from the point of view of the miracle Jesus worked in this man's life. I mean, did it take Jesus two tries to get it right – the first time left this guy seeing people looking like trees, but by the second time he finally saw things properly? As a side note, I chuckle a little bit picturing Jesus as an eye doctor: Which is better one or two, one or two? But I digress. Why did it take two times? Because it takes time! God's timing is not our timing. And God's ways are often not our ways – even when it comes to conversion in our lives.

Sometimes we might feel like God is moving painstakingly slow in our lives – that growth is slower than molasses in February. Other times it can feel like change happens too quickly – in the blink of an eye. Either way, as Romans 8:28 reminds us: “All things work for the good of those who love God.” And whether He chooses to work quickly, or slowly, or somewhere in between over the course of our lives, He wants to open us totally and completely to see the truth – the truth of who we are in Christ, the truth about sin, the truth of salvation, the state of our world, good and evil. The thing is, to mature in the faith, and to *see* more clearly, we must go through this process of turning, or conversion, again and again and again – which is part of the reason we celebrate Lent each and every year.

This all brings to mind the familiar words of one last great hymn, *Amazing Grace*. We sing, “I once was lost but now am found; was blind, but now I see.” In the spiritual life, enlightenment is a gradual process. At first, we cannot see God’s truth clearly, and spiritual blindness remains. But as we’re formed by the Truth, our faith grows through obedience to Jesus, who then increases the clarity of our spiritual sight, and we understand more fully. Rinse and repeat this whole process, all the way to heaven!

And so, at the beginning of our Lenten journey, in light of Jesus' miracle of restoring sight to the man who was blind, let us ask ourselves the following questions:

1. Do I recognize my own blindness – in terms of prejudice, self-centeredness, or when it comes to my own particular sins and weaknesses?
2. Do I want Jesus to heal my spiritual blindness?
3. At times, we see only what we want to see. In fact, many people of Jesus' time could only see Him as a blasphemer, others as a miracle worker, others as the Son of God? So, do I want to see things how God sees them, or am I content to keep on seeing them how I want to see them?

Let us take time this Lent to pause in prayer and ask Jesus to heal our spiritual blindness as part of our life-long process of conversion. And let us pray: "Lord Jesus, restore my sight to your revelation and to your healing presence. Help me to walk according to your truth and not to stumble in the darkness of sin. And may I help others find your healing light and saving presence too." God bless you.