

Living In Expectation - Welcoming Jesus

Mark 8:11 - 9:1

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They didn't get it. Actually, truth be told, they didn't **WANT** to get it.
The Pharisees and other Jewish leaders, that is.
They didn't want to "get" what Jesus was all about.

Jesus arrives in the region of Dalmanutha with his disciples. And the "welcome party" hunts him down.

They're belligerent, even aggressive in their posture towards Jesus. Mark tells us they asked Jesus for a sign from heaven. It's a challenge.

They're wanting compelling, outward - **visible** - proof that Jesus has the spiritual authority which he claims to have; that he's got the close connection, the "IN" with God that he says he does.

He doesn't fit their expectations or their way of doing things. So....

It better be visible.

It better be good.

It's a real "*show me*" mentality.

Jesus, however, doesn't play ball with them.

He walks away, grieved and disappointed. Impatient.

They've refused to see Jesus for who he is in what he has already done.

And they'll not see a thing. Not now.

They'll be as good as.... well.... blind.

Which, in fact, they are.

Stuck in stubborn, willful unbelief and blindness.

Unwilling to see Jesus as the divine Son of God.

Unwilling to see Him as the promised Saviour of the world.

And because of their aggressive attack mode posturing, Jesus walks away.

In fact, doesn't just walk away.

He gets in the boat and leaves town entirely.

Heads to the other side of the lake.

If they're that stuck on it, wanting to have their little religious structures all set up according to their own rules and traditions and expectations - well then.....

....they'll have it their way. But they'll have to have it their way...

...ALONE.

Friends, there's nothing worse for a person who wants to deal with God on their own terms, and for God to agree.

For the only way God will agree to us having it our way is by walking away and leaving us alone.

It's true on an individual level. It's true on a congregational level. It's true on a national level.

Jesus leaves - quickly, it seems. So quickly that the disciples forget to pick up food supplies.

Partway across the lake the boys realize it. And Jesus seizes the moment to teach them a lesson.

"Watch out - beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and the yeast of Herod."

He was using yeast, a key ingredient in bread, as a metaphor. The thing with yeast is that a little goes a long way.

The yeast Jesus was referring to was the spiritual attitude of the religious leaders - the Pharisees and Herod's representatives.

"Don't let yourselves get inoculated with their '*do it my way*' attitude," says Jesus.

A little of that goes a long way to destroying one's spiritual well-being. It doesn't take much in the way of rigid expectations and understanding about God in order to close one off from being able to see God at work around you; keeping you from sensing the presence of God when it comes nearby.

The disciples, however, don't get it.

They're too distracted.

And they are fingered by Jesus as having "eyes and fail to see." (v.18)

One big difference, though, between them and the Pharisees.

They, however, remain an object of Jesus' compassion and teaching.

Stubborn and arrogant hardness causes Jesus to walk away.

Distraction does not.

In this case, distraction of worrying about their immediate needs. We'll need food. Don't have enough food. Where will we find food? It gets them so worried that they miss the bigger picture completely.

Verse 16 makes that clear.

And Jesus tears a strip off them for that attitude. He reminds them of the feedings, with all those baskets of leftovers. "Don't you get it? My power. My ability to restore life where only bleak emptiness is present. My authority. Don't you get it? Your concern over these little things of right now prevent you from seeing the bigger things. Don't you see?"

Well, in fact - no, they still don't see.

And friends, let's not be too hard on the disciples. How often isn't it so that **we too** become distracted by what we deem to be immediate and pressing concerns, and only later on do we realize, how much we have been distracted from the presence and call and service of Christ?

Mark continues on the theme of blindness. Some people lead a fellow to Jesus. He's too blind to find the Saviour himself.

Which, by the way, is **SO** much how it is for all of us. There aren't too many people that can say they came to a relationship with Christ by themselves. There's pretty much always a story of a person, or two, or many more, who helped lead and guide them to their time of personal encounter with Jesus.

Can you name some of them from your life?

Or, can you see where God has used you to lead a spiritually blind person towards Jesus? Perhaps not the whole way, but some steps along the way - where, perhaps, someone else picked up the task and guided that person the next steps?

Jesus - he takes him away from the crowd. To a quiet place. Where there are no distractions. And no onlookers. Just him and the Saviour. And in that personal space, Jesus addresses his blindness.

That, too, is part of the way Jesus works.

There's his work in public, with the large crowds.

And work in smaller groups, with the little band of disciples around him.

And there are the personal, one-on-one encounters. Which, at some point all of us need. All of us need to make that personal surrender and commitment and response, a surrender and commitment and response that, then, we live out for the Kingdom of God as one living part of the larger, communal Body Of Christ.

So Jesus takes this blind man and leads him by the hand to a private, personal space. It's a different type of healing than the norm. But that's because Jesus deals with each of us as unique people. There is no one "right" way for our meeting the Saviour. No singular paradigm for the work of saving grace in a person's life.

Sometimes it comes in one powerful act.

Sometimes it comes, as John Calvin says, as it does into this person's life, "drop by drop" until finally that point comes where they exclaim, "I can see.... I get it!"

Mark continues the story. Now Jesus carries on with his disciples. They move north towards Caesarea Philippi. It was a cosmopolitan centre. Many cultures bringing many different beliefs into town. And the attitude of the local government was that all religions were equally valid.... so long as it didn't pinch on a person's loyalty to the crown. Keep your faith at home. In public, you are first and foremost a citizen of the state.

Sound familiar?

In that setting Jesus turns again to the disciples, asking them what other people saw in him, and then -

- well, then the real kicker.

Because, discussions about Jesus are fine in the abstract or in the third person.... talking about what others see and say and think.

But what really matters is Jesus question to the disciples

"What do you see in me?"

It's the real question for us, too.

Gathered people of faith at Calvin - "What do you see in me?"

Peter answers in a way that shows he's gaining spiritual sight.

He's beginning to see it.

"You are the Messiah."

Peter sees Jesus to be the One that God has promised from of old.

Peter gets it.

But then comes the word - *"Don't say a thing to anyone."*

Apparently they don't see it clearly enough.

Like the blind man who saw people as walking trees, so Peter's spiritual vision of Jesus is still distorted.

And so the Lord begins to teach them.

That's the last part of our reading.

Jesus provides corrective action to their spiritual vision. He speaks to them about who he is as "The Christ."

This is hard stuff. Because the Messiahship, the saving work of Jesus, is not first of all about upward mobility, about getting - so to speak - more bread in the boat, or getting life's illnesses and challenges and inconveniences removed. It is not about political power to challenge those stubborn Pharisees and gaining the glory of the crowds.

It is about struggle and suffering

and

death.

Jesus gives the disciples a little more spiritual sight and insight when he speaks of his suffering and death and resurrection.

Ah, they're still rather blind to it all - Peter's response demonstrates that.

But in time they'll come to see.

They'll come to see that the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus is **THE** great pinnacle moment, the fulcrum of cosmic history.

The modern human mind has trouble seeing that.

We're rather blind to this, actually; to the notion that there can even be such a thing as a tipping moment in history. We have trouble believing that there can be a person or place or time of ultimate significance.

People tend to see history as a giant river, like the St. Lawrence, washing everything downstream towards the vast Atlantic Ocean of time, where it all deposits and accumulates. We don't see that it could, say, be pinched through a narrows.

The bible, however, has no such difficulty. Not only is it possible. That is **exactly** what happened! It happened in the person of Jesus. It happened during the time of his life on earth. It happened, ultimately, in a bit of real estate just outside the city of Jerusalem.

It is **THE** greatest moment is all of time.

The great showdown: the powers of sin and hell and evil and the devil – standing against the powers of the Living God in Jesus.

It was death against life.

The stakes were enormous - at stake was the very outcome and direction of Cosmic history.

And it would be decided when Jesus enters the very heart of enemy territory, by moving deliberately towards death. He was cursed - abandoned by God, forsaken. All alone he had to face death. All alone he had to enter eternal darkness carrying the condemnation that properly belonged to you and me and every other sin-bearing creature.

The great power was unveiled the morning he stepped out the grave - alive and well. The curse was broken. Death was shattered. Evil lost its icy grip on the cosmos. And the direction of history was inexorably shifted towards a day when all pain and sorrow and tears and death and evil would be eradicated from the earth - when Creation would be made New.

That's the moment of "the Kingdom of God coming with power" to which Jesus referred in 9:1. And those with eyes of faith were, in fact, there to see it.

It is **THE** great sign of God's Kingdom. And it was the **ONLY** sign that, ultimately, the Pharisees and the rest of the world are given. It is the sign that matters most.

To the Pharisees - who never did see it.

To the disciples - whose spiritual eyes were eventually open to it.

And to us.

Friends, it is the beginning of the season of Advent. The time of preparing for Christmas. And as we begin, the question of Scripture is - What do we see?

And what are we prepared to do by way of response to what we see?

How will we see the Jesus of Christmas?

And, seeing, are we willing to follow Him?

Are we willing to go public, so that others can see Him living through us as a community of believers here in Ottawa? Or do we keep it hidden from sight? Squirrelled away in the dark. Private.

Here comes Jesus' call to take up the cross.

In Mark's day it was a public identification of a condemned person as a rebel against Rome; identifying someone who committed the crime of serving an authority figure they deem to be greater than any social or governmental authority; greater than Caesar.

Be like that, says Jesus. Be public, very public, in your identity as serving me.

That's I'm more important than the government of the day.

Friends, we live in a society where there is growing pressure towards living a secret spiritual life - keep your opinions on matters of faith to yourself. Don't let it affect debate about public policy, or social expectations. Whatever your holy book or religious figure might say about care for the poor

or handling of the environment or norms for marriage and sexual conduct – never mind. You keep that to yourself.

Jesus will have none of that kind of blind spirituality. Not back then. And not today.

Friends, as we leave here today, consider with me -

What dominates our thinking these days?

As your neighbors and co-workers watch you live - what do they see?

Is your allegiance to Jesus visible? Or blind? Hidden?

What do they see as being the most important part of your life?

Not what you **say** is important. But - what do your actions **show** to be most important?

Whatever it is that you pick up and carry around and keep yourself busy with...

...what does that say about you?

Friends, as you welcome the Christ of Christmas -

Who do you see Him to be? And, seeing, will you follow?

No matter the cost?