

Over the years I noticed I have having difficult seeing words on the printed page. When I got new eyeglasses, I could suddenly see again! What are the times and place where you can see well, and when (like your hearing) is your vision poor? Today we listened to two eye-opening stories which shook up the routine and create a wonderful new vision!

Pharisees were committed to their faith, assuming if everyone would keep the law perfectly the promised Messiah would finally arrive. As a passionate Pharisee, Saul (who would later be known as Paul) was upset and felt followers of Jesus were not keeping the law perfectly. They even thought Jesus was the promised Messiah. His eyes were closed to any other reality, and for a long time he missed seeing the miracle of Easter.

Jesus' disciples had spent three intense years in training, only to watch him suffer and die. Suddenly he was alive again, but they were having trouble believing their eyes. Several of the post resurrection accounts revealed a lack of even recognizing that Jesus indeed was alive. Their eyes were working but not seeing.

Even though the world was changing around them, both the Saul and disciples of Jesus were so focused on their understandings their eyesight was compromised. Both Saul and disciples had faith but were lacking in vision. They could only see what they were comfortable or used to seeing. How often do we run into that same wall of selfishness, fear, and misunderstanding today? Jesus has changed everything and yet too often Easter's power becomes blurry, and our old vision returns to haunt even believers.

*Easter changes everything or changes nothing. There is nothing in between! Either it is the same old life or a brand-new life!* How much of difference does Easter make for you? Saul saw better when he was blinded to what he knew. The disciples' confusion was lifted with another miracle on the lake. What does it take for you to really open your eyes to what God has done for you?

We think we see so well. Understand completely. Have all the answers. But fears, doubts, or blind adherence to tradition with no passion can blind us to the incredible power and bright light of Easter! It took a blinding light for Saul and a miraculous catch of fish for disciples to see *in a new way*. Are we OK or do we still need more time to see Jesus in a brand-new way?

You have heard of the novelist James Michener. What is not known is his decision to write came from a personal crisis. He had always dreamed of writing but always also had excuses not to write. As a WWII correspondent he was on a plane that crashed on island in South Pacific. After surviving he wrote, "I am going to live my life and concentrate on the biggest ideas I can handle." And that day he started writing "South Pacific," the first of 40 novels! He always had the potential, but it took vision to set him free.

Think about Paul's conversion. It was dramatic but it took a while for scales to fall away! Acts tells the story and Paul retells it in his letter to the Ephesians. After the blinding light it took time for his eyes to heal. He needed to go out in the desert for a while. He had to pray. He had to read scripture. He had to grow. And slowly his eyes opened to what he

had been blind to before.

Jesus disciples also needed time for their eyes to open. We take away from the reality of the resurrection aftermath, if we don't listen closely to the story and watch to see how long it took for those closest to really see Jesus. Remember the story at the tomb? Mary spoke with Jesus but didn't recognize him as her eyes were too clouded with grief and tears. It took his voice for her to realize he was alive! These disciples saw Jesus standing on the shore, but it took a familiar catch of fish for them to remember something they had seen before. And then in the bread and fish and a reminder of the miraculous feeding of 5000, their eyes suddenly were opened.

Just like it takes our eyes awhile to adjust to the light after we have stared into headlights or spotlights in the darkness of the night, so Easter was a blinding light, but it took a while for eyes to adjust to faith. But adjust they did, and so it is for us. When we watch, and listen, and are patient, we also learn that seeing is believing and believing is simply seeing the reality that Jesus brings for what it truly is! It takes time, but like anything worth having, it is worth the time that it takes to understand and embrace what is special and precious and life changing in our midst!

If Jesus asked, *do you love me?* Wouldn't we answer, *YES!* Why then did he need ask Peter that question 3 times? Didn't he believe Peter's answer or was he helping Peter *understand the question?*

What does our faith help us to see: Is it only Jesus or the flock he entrusts to our care? Listen again to the question Jesus asks, "Do you love me?" And his forcing Peter to not say yes until he really understood why the question was asked!

It is too easy to accept a risen Jesus and see what we want or have time for. It is easy to say I believe when it doesn't affect our level of comfort. But take time to understand what happened at Bethlehem and Golgotha and an empty tomb! Understand the enormity of God's sacrificial love for a frail and selfish humanity. And then think again about the question Jesus asked. And think a second time and then a third? Do you love God? We just finished another Easter and whether we have heard the voice clearly or not, Jesus calls to us every day (in so many ways) asking "Do you love me? Do YOU love me? Do you love ME?" What would happen in your family if a spouse or parent or child had to keep asking the same question over and over again? Would that simply mean you weren't listening or that what you were doing didn't make your love clear?

Jesus calls us as we open scripture, as we taste bread and wine, as we receive the promise of forgiveness, as we are embraced by the serving of someone who loves us, and in the voice of the stranger or neighbor or coworker. In so many ways, Jesus asks, "Do YOU LOVE ME?" And it isn't that Jesus doesn't know the answer, but rather that he wants us to consider how we will respond!

When Rox asks "do you love me" it isn't that she doesn't know I do, but to remind me that I have not taken the time lately to show her that I do. And our actions in daily life are similar responses that proclaim whether we love God as much as we claim! Faith is based on what we can see, or prove, and often can't understand. That is why it is called faith and

not something else. Faith is based on what we can see, and faith is believing and seeing in a new way! For some that happened with a blinding light on a road to Damascus. For others it was a miraculous catch of fish and a barbeque on a beach!

What is it that has opened your eyes and helped you to let go of fears and cloudy vision? Maybe it was the birth of a child. Maybe it was an unexplainable feeling of peace after prayer. Maybe it was hearing a voice you had not heard in years? Maybe it was a loving embrace from someone you thought was no longer your friend.

How do you hear Jesus ask, "Do you love me?" And how do you understand what that question really means. And once you have listened to that question and realized that you really do love Jesus, listen to what comes next. For after Jesus asks "do you love me" comes the better word, a new command, a new vision, and a new vocation. FEED my sheep! Feed MY sheep! Feed my SHEEP!

*Will we live as if empty tomb is distant memory or daily CALL? You see the important question is not whether or not Easter has improved vision" but rather "will you feed my sheep?" Seeing is not only believing and but seeing and living in a New Way"*

When we not only see Jesus but answer his call then seeing is believing and believing is seeing in a new way! Or as Jesus said to the blind man, "Go in peace, your faith has made you well!" Amen