

Many of the controversies and confrontations in daily living come from people seeing the same thing in different ways. We all have been part of that confusion. A child is asked to clean up his room. He throws all his dirty clothes in a pile in the closet, pulls the blanket off the floor and puts it in a pile on his bed, looks around and is satisfied with his effort. Dad walks in and blows a gasket at what he sees and shouts "why didn't you clean up the room?" They see the same objects but interpret them in different ways.

A husband and wife can notice a beautiful young lady walking down the street and each sees something different, just as would have happened if it had been a good-looking guy instead. In more dramatic ways, the political savior of one group of people is seen as a terrible human by others. We understand what it means to look at the same thing and have different ideas about what is seen.

Throughout Jesus' ministry there was confusion about what people were seeing when Jesus wandered into a village. The Gospel of Mark is especially attuned to this confusion. A sub theme of his Gospel could be "be careful what you see when you look at Jesus." Mark is full of instances where someone sees a miracle and wanted to tell the world who Jesus was, but Jesus told them to be quiet because they couldn't see the full picture yet! Another pattern emerges, when Jesus explains exactly what he will do as Messiah, and his closest disciples can't want to ignore that picture of his mission, wanting a different visual.

This story of the healing of a blind man fits the pattern. Jesus walks into town and the blind man calls Jesus using Messianic titles. The crowd tells him to keep quiet. The irony is a blind man sees Jesus for who he really is, while the sighted people don't have clue and are embarrassed by the man's words. This is the complete reverse of an exorcism Jesus performed when the evil spirits cried out "I know who you are!" and Jesus commanded them to be silent. Why would he allow his adversary to have opportunity to paint the wrong picture? We have often heard seeing is believing, but that doesn't always work as we realize many can see the same thing but believe something very different.

What do we see when we look at the world around us? What do we see when we look in a mirror? What do others see when they look at us? Those are the key questions at play in our own understanding of Jesus' mission and ministry. God looks at us with nothing but love. He forgives, he restores, he gives us the power to change our living from selfishness and despair to servant love and hope. As we see what God has done for us, how can we not respond in a new way?

If God can love me despite my shortcomings, how can I refuse to forgive or love someone else, even if they are different or won't love me? When we live with the awareness that God has created this universe and loves all people, will that not change what we see when we open our eyes to the sights of daily living? And yet the world is full of violence, war, jealousy, selfishness, and lack of love because we fail to see what God sees. Too many are more concerned about what they want the world to look like than what it truly is. God did not wait for the world to be full of perfect people before he sent Jesus to suffer, die and rise again. Instead, because our vision is so cloudy and confused, he came to clear the vision of his love so that we might learn by seeing Jesus what we are called for others to see in you and me.

In this Gospel text we have a remarkable image of a blind man who can see Jesus, who believes in Jesus, and who clings to Jesus while the people around him assumed because he was blind, he couldn't see. The reality was that they should have been better able to see Jesus, and yet their selfishness and arrogance closed their eyes to what the blind man could clearly see.

In the 1700's there was an Englishman named John Newton. His mother died when he was six. He was sent to join the navy but did nothing but get in trouble all the time. He was abandoned in Africa and wound up working on a slave ship, participating in one of the most horrendous endeavors any human could inflict on another. During a great storm, and fearing for his life, he prayed for God to rescue him. His crew survived the storm, and he resumed his profession becoming the captain of his own slave ship.

Gradually he began to see the light and on one trip back to England, walked away, enrolled in the seminary, and was ordained as an Anglican priest. He joined forces with Wilber Wilberforce in 1807 to help pass a law banning slavery in the England. Not only was he a powerful preacher, but a prolific writer of hymns, the lyrics of one go like this: "*I once was lost, but now am found, was blind but now I see.*" It took time for his vision to clear, but when faith became his focus, his life changed forever. The hymn Amazing Grace is the story of his life.

It was the story of the blind man from Jericho's life as well. Although he was blind, he could see. Although he was abandoned and lost from society he was found. Jesus told him his faith is what healed him. And we all know faith is believing what we cannot see. Is there any more powerful example of amazing grace than this story of a blind man whom everyone wanted to shut up, and despite the darkness of his life was able to see the Light of the world? Another stunning visual in this account is when Jesus responded to his cries and asked, "what can I do for you?" The man threw off his cloak and ran to the voice. Despite his blindness he was already moving forward and leaving his old life behind. He said, let me see again." The essence of what Jesus said was, you already can see, but now I will heal your eyes as well. For once we can see Jesus, we can see everything much more clearly ... don't you think?

And the coup de grace occurred when this man who had been held back by bad eyes and a restrictive crowd followed Jesus from Jericho to Calvary. That is what Mark reports. Jesus was on the way to showing the world who he really was, and this man joined him in that journey.

And now we are at the bottom line. What will we do with this event and the reality of believing what we see? We have more going for us than either the blind man or John Newton did for most of their lives. Yet look at how faith erased the darkness of their lives and enabled them to share their vision with others who needed help learning to see "the light."

Our world has so many answers, instructions, and commands, but continues in so many ways to be blind to the love of God and the life he calls us to live. It is up to those of us who believe to take time to be changed by what we have seen.