

Mark 8:22-26

“A Miracle in Process”

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The Reading:

²² They came to Bethsaida. Some people brought a blind man to him and begged him to touch him. ²³ He took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village; and when he had put saliva on his eyes and laid his hands on him, he asked him, “Can you see anything?” ²⁴ And the man looked up and said, “I can see people, but they look like trees, walking.” ²⁵ Then Jesus laid his hands on his eyes again; and he looked intently and his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly. ²⁶ Then he sent him away to his home, saying, “Do not even go into the village.”

This is a different sort of miracle, isn't it?

This past week, I got a call from Pearl Vision wanting to set up my annual eye exam. This biblical miracle is kind of like going to the eye doctor. A man couldn't see, so his friends took him to Pearl Vision, that is, to Jesus, the Healer, in order to restore his sight.

For his part, Jesus first took the man by the hand, *outside* of Bethsaida, where maybe it was quieter, less distracting, and probably in order to avoid conflict, and went through Step One of the miracle. This involved saliva and a laying-on-of-hands. Then, as when an ophthalmologist goes through the different lenses, Jesus asked, “How's this?” “Better, but blurry.” So after some period of time, the healing miracle went into Step Two. No saliva this time. Jesus laid his hands on the man's eyes and looked intently at him. After this, he could see clearly!

Apparently, some miracles come about through a process, over time, little by little, *not* all at once.

I'm sure that you have experienced a few of these as part of normal life. Pregnancy and birth, for instance, is a miracle that takes months. Loss and grief over the death of a loved one only transitions to acceptance after other phases. People who battle and recover from addictions know that this kind of miracle is a long and winding road.

The same is true for the movement of the world toward *God's* Kingdom. It takes miracles accomplished over time. Diplomats, for example, dialogue over and over again to forge a lasting, just peace! It will also take a miracle for humankind to ever agree upon a just economic order that reflects God's love, not to mention enacting it!

Yesterday at PorchFest, we accepted donations to the Jimmy Fund. This money will go to further cancer research. It is miraculous what gains science has made in this arena! I, for one, have certainly benefited from them. Once again, though, this progress is a miracle *in process*.

As theologian Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki puts it: “God works with what *is* in order to bring about what can be.”¹

I realize that some people wouldn’t agree that cancer research, diplomacy, and grief work are “miracles.” To *them*, a miracle is a sudden, surprising, inexplicable positive outcome, by direct, divine intervention. And whom among us wouldn’t prefer a miracle that happens immediately and completely, *without* us having to lift a finger?! Sure.

For example, it would be nice if we didn’t need to raise awareness in our society that Black Lives Matter, or have to learn our history in its fullness, or dig into the pervasiveness of white supremacy. If God could simply touch our hearts, change our minds, transform our actions and structures, and force us to see and be anti-racist, then we would not need to engage in the uncomfortable, blurry labor of dialogue and understanding.

Sure, we’d love to sing along with Johnny Nash, “I can see clearly now!” or “*We* can see clearly now!”² But this miracle takes a process of engagement, development, learning, and growth.

So today’s story gives us the chance to believe in a God who works miracles in us and through us, in steps and stages. The blind man of Bethsaida gives us hope that we, too, plus the church are miracles *in process*! **Because amazingly, there are benefits even in blurriness.**

Interim ministry in a congregation like this one is an example. It’s *liminal* time. You are *in between* settled ministers, while still engaged in real ministry! You get to ask questions and experiment during these two years in ways that you might put off if you were in a permanent pastoral relationship.

In the same way, your Directional Statement (*refer to it in the bulletin*) is a miracle in process. It is *not* a complete Vision, or a refined Mission Plan with implementation steps. It is a *direction*. Some aspects of it are still blurry. For instance, will you serve the food insecure beyond the Food Pantry? Can you make much of an impact on Housing? Attempting this by yourself is not the best idea. In other words, you are in the “trees walking” phase that will eventually become *you* walking, and *with* others.

One of the *benefits* of being in between is that we get to actually *be* “in the moment.” This is a humble place and an exercise in trust. Most of all, during this kind of miracle – one in process – Jesus will take you by the hand and lead you *outside* of your preconceived cultural notions. You will have to be closer to him than usual – allowing his spittle to contact your eyes, feeling the weight of his hands on your shoulders, and the intensity of his stare. But that’s how he accomplishes miracles! Jesus accompanies each and all of us across the threshold into God’s future, so that you can clearly see what *he* sees. **You are a miracle in process!**

¹Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki, *God Christ Church: A Practical Guide to Process Theology* (New York: Crossroad, 1989), 223.

²Johnny Nash, “I Can See Clearly Now,” 1972.