

Build a Bridge: Seeing

Mark 8:22-25

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One of my favorite movies is called “The Blind Side.” It is the story of football player, Michael Orr. Michael’s position on the field is designed to protect the quarterback’s blind side. Most QB’s are right-handed and their vision is focused towards the right side of the offensive line, and often they can’t see what’s coming up on the left, so they call it their blind side.

I am not a football player, but I have a blind side. This past summer, my blind side was revealed to me in a big way! My blind side was in how I understood the extent of racial injustice. Words cannot express how I felt as I watched the video of George Floyd’s breath being slowly pressed out of him to his death. My eyes were opened to a new way of seeing racism. Racism in my town became even clearer as Pastor Jeff interviewed several people from our congregation that have been the victims of racial injustice over and over again.

Hearing their stories of injustice, well that just made me sick to my stomach. I thought race relations were good. I always said, “I don’t see color when I see a person.” I now realize that isn’t helpful. Of course I see color when I see someone. We all do. I don’t dislike someone because of the color of their skin, but now I understand that isn’t enough. That isn’t enough for someone who experiences racism. We are called to “do justice” and advocate for those who live with injustice.

We are in a worship series entitled, “Build a Bridge.” We believe that being called by Jesus to build bridges where injustice has left a deep chasm, dividing us from one another, is what we’re called to be about. And we need to open our eyes, our hearts, and our souls to those who have lived and continue to live with racial injustice.

Personally, I had a blind side when it came to racial injustice. I needed to see more clearly the injustice that was right in front of me. The Gospel of Mark tells a significant story about seeing more clearly. Today’s reading is from the Gospel of St. Mark 8:22-25.

²² When they arrived at Bethsaida, some people brought a blind man to Jesus, and they begged him to touch the man and heal him. ²³ Jesus took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village. Then, spitting on the man’s eyes, he laid his hands on him and asked, “Can you see anything now?”

²⁴ The man looked around. “Yes,” he said, “I see people, but I can’t see them very clearly. They look like trees walking around.”

²⁵ Then Jesus placed his hands on the man’s eyes again, and his eyes were opened. His sight was completely restored, and he could see everything clearly.

There are several meanings in this story. First of all, it is unique because it takes more than once for this man to be able to see clearly. The healing doesn’t happen all at once. It takes time. The man cannot see clearly at first. Although the man’s vision is ultimately restored, Jesus provides a second healing to bring sight to the blind man. And that is good news because it takes many of us time to see that racism right in front of us is there but we can’t always see it clearly. Many of us can see the same thing, but have completely different ways of seeing it. It may take time to see the whole picture. For instance, take a look at this picture:

What did you see? Did you see a frog? If you saw a frog... you’re right! Did you see a horse? Well if you saw a horse, you’re right! This is a picture of both a frog and a horse. When most people look at this picture, they see either a frog or a horse. But if you take time to really look, to really see, you are able to see both images. Often it takes time to see the whole picture. In this picture, I saw the horse. And it took time for me to see the frog. It can be that way with seeing racism, as well. It takes time to notice there is something deeper happening: that racism can be so deeply embedded in the status quo that we’ve stopped seeing it... stopped looking for it.

I can relate to the blind man in this gospel story as I walk a bridge toward seeing racial injustice. I realize I don’t always see clearly what has been right in front of me. I haven’t seen racism clearly. It has taken me time to have my eyes opened. And it continues to be an eye opening process. The more I look with new awareness, the more I see how people have been experiencing injustice due to the color of their skin.

In the gospel, the blind man was taken outside of the village to meet with Jesus. He had to walk on the

outskirts of town, to walk away from everything that was familiar to him, to a place where he was alone with Jesus. Like the man in the gospel, I've had to walk away from what I thought I knew and lean on Jesus for a new way of seeing. I've had to let go of what has been my familiar way of seeing racism, and depend on Jesus for opening up my own heart to see the injustice more clearly.

Do you know that Jesus has called every one of us to stand up for those who are oppressed by injustice. And as we look at the life and ministry of Jesus, we see Him engaged in bringing justice and mercy to those who are oppressed. He loves the outcast, the despised, and the rejected. When we follow Jesus, we live as he has called us to live; bringing about justice and mercy. But doing that, living that way can be challenging.

Think of how many relationships are fractured, broken, and strained. There is a division that is surrounded by bitterness, negativity and indifference. So what can building a bridge look like amongst the messiness we experience?

It begins by understanding and recognizing that we may not see clearly what is right in front of us. It means asking Jesus to open our hearts and our eyes to see what he sees. To be able to walk away from our own comfort zones into a place with Jesus that we haven't been, so that we can see more clearly.

We live in a world where people are treated with injustice, often just because of the color of their skin. It occurs on a daily basis. Sometimes it's hard to see... and sometimes it's not. God has always been about justice. In Micah 6:8 it says, *"He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God."*

In Isaiah 1:17 it says, *"Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed."*

And Psalm 106 says, *"Blessed are those who act justly, who always do what is right."*

The scriptures are clear, Jesus is clear, we are called to stand up for justice.

So where do we begin? No matter where you are in this process, it is important to accept just where you are. Then, one place to start is to look at where you are towards building a bridge of racial reconciliation.

We can all start by asking ourselves if we even WANT to see things differently? The blind man did and Jesus opened his eyes. Perhaps for some of us the first step is a change of heart...to want to see.

Well, I'd like to leave you with an impactful spoken word video that speaks to the idea of seeing. While you're watching this ask yourself, Which people in my life am I facing away from? How might I reach out and turn around to hear and see these people more clearly? Am I open to God moving in my heart to help me truly see others? And then I encourage you to ask God, loud or silently to yourself, to give you the courage to see, and to give our congregation the courage to be the hands and feet of Jesus as we build a bridge of reconciliation.