

**First United Methodist Church  
618 Eighth Street  
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“Seeking: Asking the Right Questions”  
Text: John 9:1-41

In the endearing classic novel, “The Little Prince” there is an oft quoted line that has been translated as follows: “It is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye.” That is a breath-taking phrase. We spend a good deal of our life, relearning that simple lesson. The essential things of life are invisible.

My eyes tell me that the dandelion a child brings to a parent is a worthless weed. But with the right eyes, it is a symbol of beauty plucked with care and given to someone special as an act of love. The sentiment is equal to a dozen long stem roses given by a loved one. My eyes tell me that the man driving slow on the interstate is an inconvenience to me. But with the right eyes, what one might see is an old man traveling to a nursing home where he will visit his wife of 65 years, even though with her advanced Alzheimer’s she will not recognize him. He is not an inconvenience; he is a living testament to the power of love.

Let us pray that together God will give us fresh eyes to see the world around us:

**God of all things, big and small, you have infused the world with beauty and grace and goodness. Forgive us when we overlook those gifts. Open our eyes anew to see ourselves, those around us and all of Creation with wonder and awe. Amen.**

Sherlock Holmes and his partner Watson decided to take a break from their busy work of crime solving. To get away from it all, they went on a camping trip. After a quiet evening, they retired to their tent for a night’s sleep. In the middle of the night, however, Sherlock Holmes awakened Watson and said, “Look up! What do you see?”

Watson pondered for a moment and replied matter-of-factly, “I see stars.”

“Yes,” said Sherlock Holmes, “but what does that mean?”

Pausing for a moment Watson then replied, “Astrologically, I see that Jupiter is in the constellation of Virgo. Theologically, I see that we are a part of a vast universe created by a powerful God. Astronomically, I see that there are many galaxies each of which has the potential to sustain life. Meteorologically, I see that it is clear tonight and looks like we will have a pleasant day tomorrow. Horologically, by the placement of the stars, I would deduce that it must be about 3:00 a.m.”

Shaking his head in disgust, Holmes replied, “Watson, you idiot! The fact that you can see stars means that someone stole our tent!”

We call it missing the forest for the trees. Sometimes the most obvious things are right there in front of our eyes, but we completely overlook them. In order to renew the ability to see the obvious things, let us begin by talking about the obstacle to a clear vision.

One possibility may be a hectic lifestyle. On more than one occasion, I have been so intent upon getting to the next appointment or the next meeting or whatever it may be, that I missed something quite obvious. Last month, I completely missed the Finance Committee meeting. It was on my calendar. I was prepared for the meeting. But the day of the committee, Diane and I were completing our wills and other important paperwork and it was a beautiful day. I suggested we go for a walk. Then, my stomach reminded me that it was lunch time. We had a nice lunch together. When I finally returned to the office, I discovered the minutes from the meeting were already in my email. I had completely forgotten the meeting. Now, in that regard, I think it was a good call. I don’t imagine I will look back on my deathbed and regret that I missed that meeting, although it is very likely that I will look back and regret the times I didn’t take a walk on a pretty day or enjoy a lunch with my wife. That may not be the best illustration, but one of the things that can keep us from seeing the things around us is a busy schedule, flitting from one task to the next without ever taking the time to enjoy the moment before us.

Another thing that can keep us from seeing what is right before us is simply a lack of attentiveness. We are distracted by minor items and fail to notice the goodness and beauty that is all around us. Poet William Carlos Williams used to carry a notepad everywhere he went. One it was the heading, “Things I noticed today that I’ve missed until today.” It was a great exercise in paying attention. We might walk the same route day after day and fail to notice what is right there in front of us.

Another obstacle to seeing what is right before us is the problem of impatience. Rather than enjoying the moment, we want to get through it and get to the next task. We get tired of the tasks and the details that lead to something special.

In his book, “Three Cups of Tea” Greg Mortensen tells of a near death experience while mountain climbing in Pakistan. After being nursed back to health in a rural village, Mortensen wanted to repay their kindness. He left the village with a promise to return and build a much needed school.

Mortensen was a man of his word. Although it took a while to raise the funds, he obtained enough money to build the schools and return to the village that had helped him. He was impatient and wanted to get all the materials and build the school in a short span of time. What he failed to realize is that this village had waited hundreds of years for a school. Delaying a few months would not be the end of the world to them. And in his impatience, he was missing out on a very important aspect, the building of relationships.

One of the elders pulled him aside and served him tea. The elder explained that in their culture, “the first time you share tea with [someone] you are a stranger. The second time you take tea,

you are an honored guest. The third time you share a cup of tea, you become family, and for family, we are prepared to do anything, even die.”

Reflecting upon that wisdom, Mortensen wrote, “We Americans think you have to accomplish everything quickly. We’re a country of thirty-minute power lunches and two-minute football drills...Haji Ali taught me to share three cups of tea, to slow down and make the building of relationships as important as building projects.”

Our impatience, our busy lives, our lack of attentiveness keep us from seeing what is right in front of us. But we are not alone.

Today’s gospel reading is often described as the story of the blind man who is healed. But on a deeper level, it is not about blindness, but about the inability to see. There is a difference.

The story begins with Jesus and his disciples walking together. The disciples see a blind man and this leads them to ask a question. The disciples ask, “Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” When they look at the blind man, they see the consequences of sin. Someone has done something that has caused this bad thing to happen. Someone or something must be responsible. Bad things happen for a reason. So they want to know, is it the man’s sin or that of his parents?

Given these two options, no matter how Jesus responds, the answer will not look good. If the man was born blind, what could he have possibly done that would be so bad as to take away his ability to see? What kind of capricious God would be so cruel? And if his blindness is not of his own doing, but punishment for something his parents did, again that seems unfair and cruel. There is no good way to answer this question. And that is because the question itself is flawed.

Jesus will first have to separate the notion that bad things happen as punishment, that God is a vindictive God just looking to punish human beings for their shortcoming. As terrible as this theology is, it still persists today. Sadly, there are tv preachers quick to respond to any natural disaster and equate it with God’s dissatisfaction for some sin. The earthquake, the hurricane, the floods were God’s way of exacting punishment for sins. That is wrong on so many different levels. Why would God punish innocent people to get the attention of wrongdoers? And if God is so quick to punish for wrongdoings, I should think that preachers with a net worth of hundreds of million dollars and airplanes, luxury yachts and expensive automobiles ought to be worried about God striking down their opulent lifestyles. But they are not, because God does not work that way. Nor does God bring natural disasters that hurt innocent people as a way of getting a nation’s attention.

So, the man’s blindness was not some form of punishment. It was not punishment for something his parents had done nor for any failings on his own part.

And even though the blind man had not asked for anything, Jesus spat on the ground, formed a bit of mud and spread it on the man’s eyes. He then told the man to go to a nearby pool and wash. At this point, nothing has changed. The man is still blind and Jesus is continuing on his

journey. But when the man gets to the pool and washes, his eyes are healed. For the first time in his life, he can see.

Those around him begin to ask questions. They ask him who did this. Of course, the man doesn't know, he was blind to this point. Some question whether he was really blind. The religious leaders even call in his parents. They want them to confirm whether their son was really blind. And if so, is this really your son? They are looking for ways to discredit this healing.

Though it is a long reading this morning, I wanted us to hear it in its totality because of all the questions that are raised. Who sinned? Was he really blind? Is this really the one who was blind? If Jesus was going to heal him, couldn't he have waited until after the Sabbath to do it? So many questions. So many wrong questions. By asking the wrong questions they fail to see what has occurred or the better questions they should be asking. That is why I say this is not a story about a blind man, but a story about the inability to see.

Understandably, we are fascinated with the ability of Jesus to heal the blind man. But the essence of this story is about more than that. It is about the ability to truly see. The Pharisees have physical sight, but fail to appreciate and notice what is really going on around them. What Jesus is offering is something that is crucial for us all. It is the ability to have our sight restored. For those whose lives are hectic and have missed the beauty of the world, Jesus offers to slow us down to recognize and appreciate what is before us. For those who have overlooked the importance of the things that can be seen only with the heart...love, compassion, kindness, forgiveness, justice...the things that are great treasures, but which glisten not with the strength of diamonds or gold, but with the strength of lasting goodness, Jesus offers to restore our ability to see these things for what they truly are.

The religious leaders missed the importance of the miracle that happened. And in so doing, they failed to see what Jesus had to offer them. The same is possible today. If we become so caught up in the nature of the miracle and asking the questions that aren't at the core of what is occurring, we stand the chance to miss what God is offering to each of us today.

Where do you need your vision restored? Where have you lost the sight of the things that are truly important, the things that are often seen only with the heart? Where are the relationships you have taken for granted? Where have you missed the beauty that surround us, within you and within the lives of those around you? We can answer these questions only by acknowledging that our vision has become clouded and by asking God to heal us. This is the gift offered to us all today. May we be receptive to the work of the Spirit within our lives and discover the healing that God offers us all.