

In the name of the loving, life-giving, and liberating God, who is the blessed Trinity.

“What do you want me to do for you?” That same question we heard last week is back again. “What do you want me to do for you?” While James and John asked and were not granted their request, this man is. At the most basic level, this man is only asking for healing, for the return of his sight, so of course Jesus grants his request. But Mark is never only about the surface-level reading. This is one thing I love about Mark that is often obscured by reading it in pieces. Mark is a literary genius who often comments on what is happening through the way he organizes the stories he tells about Jesus. It is no accident that Jesus asks this man the same question he asked the disciples; that it happens directly after he has spoken to his disciples; and it is definitely not only a physical truth that this man’s vision was returned, but also a metaphorical truth.

On three separate occasions, the disciples have failed to see what it means for Jesus to be the Messiah. They have skipped forward to triumph and looked for their seat in glory without waiting to see how Jesus works out that renewal. This man gets it right by asking for his vision to be restored, to be able to see clearly what is going on.

One thing to know about me is that I am an artist. I have always been interested in drawing, and when I went to college, I earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts with a concentration in oil painting. My life has not lent itself to practicing my art as much as I’d like, but it is still very much a part of who I am.

When I am painting, I get very close to the picture, absorbed in the details as I paint them. This is natural. Even if it is a large picture, the small details are what bring it to life, and I have to get in close to paint them well. But one of the things we are taught in our studio classes is that we have to take time to pause, step back, and take in the full picture frequently as we paint. If I stayed with my nose this close to the painting, I would quickly lose sight of the fuller picture. I would spend too much time on one area and not enough on another. I would lose all sense of a color scheme and a sense of balance in the painting. I need to step back again and again to be reminded of the whole.

The disciples think they know what picture Jesus is painting. The Messiah comes to bring about the Kingdom of God, to put an end to oppression, and to bring wholeness and healing to their lives. They think that Jesus will do this all at once, that the reign of God will be set up by Jesus in Jerusalem, putting an end to their suffering. But remember last week, I said that this was too small a dream for Jesus, that it was

not enough to put an end to only one empire. Jesus wanted to do more, but in their excitement, the disciples have stopped looking at the picture Jesus is painting. They are asking about details while missing the bigger picture.

And what is the bigger picture? Jesus does come to bring the Kingdom of God. In fact, in theological terms, we have a particular way to talk about this. The Kingdom of God, where God's perfect justice is established, is "already and not yet." It is already because anywhere you see love lived out, the Kingdom of God is there. And it is not yet, because looking around, there are plenty of places that could use more love, that are not yet just, and that cause harm instead of good.

When we say yes to God, we are drawn into the "already" Kingdom of God; we are drawn into a Walk of Love. It is not a place that any of us inhabit perfectly. Just like the disciples, we think we see where things are going and we start to make mistakes. We have to pull back and ask for clearer vision over and over so that we can keep following Jesus on the way. This is what we pray for week after week: "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." We are praying to make the Kingdom of God a reality here.

We do that by living into our particular gifts. Having only been here two weeks, I can already tell that you very much embody hospitality, one of the three things mentioned in your mission statement. You love to cook and fellowship with each other, and you do it well. And that is amazing. Table ministry was at the heart of Jesus' life here on earth. He sat and ate with people every chance he got, and when his time came, he instituted the Eucharist and told us to keep eating together. When we eat together, we are playing out the Eucharistic feast on a smaller scale, each and every time we do it. What are the ways we can throw open our doors to invite more to our tables? What tables might exist in our community that we could help fill?

These are the kinds of things that clearer vision can help us see—both those things which we are already doing well and where we might do more.

It is appropriate that I came to you right as Stewardship season was ready to kick off. Stewardship season is not just about money—it is about money because that is how things get done in this world—but it is also about so much more. It is about how we live in community together, what time and resources we are able to bring to the table to further this community's vision. Stewardship is about dreaming for our future together. It is about learning how to follow Jesus and walk in love together.

When we ask God for clearer vision, what do we see on the horizon? Where is God leading us next? What is the path forward? How is God calling us to make the not-yet Kingdom of God a reality in the here and now?

May we pray for eyes to see, ears to hear, and hands and hearts to do the work.