

**7.19.15 Mark 8.22-30**

**O. INTRO:**

\*You can change the meaning of a symbol, or assign a new verbal symbol to a reality...but you can't change the meaning of a fixed reality.

\*If I say that a "dog" is now a "truck"...so that "certain four-legged creatures" are now known as trucks as well as "certain four-wheeled vehicles"...I have not affected the reality of dogs or trucks in any way...those are fixed.

\*If I say "a man and woman" can make a promise and that is a "marriage" and a "man and man" can make a promise and that is a "marriage" in the same way.

\*I have simply assigned the same verbal symbol "marriage" to two different realities.

\*Of course there are also some legal, civil implications for this name change...but those legal, civil factors are not fixed realities either...they are culturally determined.

\*Married filing jointly, etc.

\*So you can call a canine a truck and a F-150 a truck and you will create confusion but you cannot in so doing alter fixed reality by messing with verbal symbols.

\*God, the gospel, Scriptures, our faith...these are fixed realities.

\*They are not mere symbols without any reality-based substance.

\*I was reading about Andy Warhol, famous Pop Artist who died in 1987.  
-His paintings have sold for over 100 million dollars.

\*He was an openly and aggressively immoral man, but he was said to be a "very religious man"

\*He regularly attended church and often used religious motifs in his works...at the same time his parties were infamous and some of his work was pornographic.

\*How do you deal with those inconsistencies?

\*Well he was a man of symbols...symbols were equal to reality.

\*So...going through the motions of church...was important to him...but those symbolic actions did not influence his real life in any substantial way.

\*His art was built around cultural symbols...icons...Marylyn Monroe and a can of soup are two of his more famous works...but those paintings were about the symbolism of cultural icons divorced from any substantial reality.

\*He loved the symbolism of Hollywood, while being fully aware that there is no substance there.

"I love Hollywood. They're beautiful. Everybody's plastic, but I love plastic. I want to be plastic."

\*In way he lived like he was a plastic man, he turned his own life into a mere symbol...so he could somehow be "very religious and at the same time live a life completely at odds with the very religion he claimed."

**\*We do not live in world that is merely a collection of symbols...we name things, but naming them does not make them.**

\*And renaming them does not unmake them.

\*Jesus is who he is...some say he is one thing, someone else another...but all that matters is who he is.

**\*It doesn't matter what we believe is true about the world it only matters if what we believe about the world is true.**

\*The passage we are going to read this morning is the turning point of the gospel of Mark.

1. First half:

-A focus on Jesus' ministry to the crowds

-Lots of signs (miracles)...pointing to Jesus as the King among them.

2. Second half:

-A focus on his ministry to the disciples

-There will be few miracles...

-From now on the narrative will move quickly to the last week of Jesus' life...that one week in his 33 years will take up 1/3 of Mark's gospel.

\*Mark's gospel is the story of the cross with a long introduction.

\*This new section opens with a two-stage healing of a blind man, the only two-stage healing in the gospels.

\*This incremental coming of physical sight to the blind man points forward to the incremental coming of spiritual sight to his disciples.

**Mark 8:22 They came to Bethsaida, and some people brought a blind man and begged Jesus to touch him. 23 He took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village. When he had spit on the man's eyes and put his hands on him, Jesus asked, "Do you see anything?" 24 He looked up and said, "I see people; they look like trees walking around." 25 Once more Jesus put his hands on the man's eyes. Then his eyes were opened, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly. 26 Jesus sent him home, saying, "Don't go into the village."**

\*In this turning point narrative a blind man is brought to Jesus by others...rather than the blind man asking to be brought to Jesus.

\*These friends beg Jesus on behalf of the blind man to heal him.

\*Perhaps this helps us understand why the healing was incremental.

- \*His faith is not quite there...maybe he is feeling hopeless and he needs his friends to carry the hope for him.
- \*Last week we looked at the fact that we are unable to be resilient all by ourselves.
- \*Here again we see the theme of needing others in the life of this blind man.
- \*On the one hand we must own our own faith...we cannot live perpetually off of the faith of others.
- \*On the other hand there are times when our own courage is gone and we need others to have enough courage and faith for the both of us.
- \*I have been there...on both sides...I have been carried by the courage and faith of others, and there have been times when others have needed me to be in that role for them.
- \*So others bring this man to Jesus...they beg for healing for him.
- \*Jesus then leads the man out of the village in order to establish personal contact with him; he didn't want the man distracted by the crowds.
- \*This man's faith was going to grow incrementally...just like his healing...just like the understanding of the disciples.
- \*The healing was externally manifested but what Jesus was doing for and in this man was internally based...the same would be true of the change in the hearts of the disciples...a change that would manifest itself externally over time.
- \*More and more of life is being lived "externally"...it seems the inner world of people is shriveling up.
- \*It is being consumed by the drive to "post" everything externally.
- \*Everything that happens "in us" we invite the outside world to witness...in near real time.
- \*Others are brought into our experiences as well as our understandings of those experiences...with little time to process those experiences ourselves.
- \*"I read this/thought this 30 seconds ago, it is a brand new insight for me...so I'm going to post my brand new insight for the world to see."
- \*This is not an anti-social media rant...social media is neutral.  
-What you do with it, or what it is doing with you is what matters.
- \*I am advocating watching your heart in these matters...there are traps out there that we can become unaware of.
- \*Watchman Nee..."If you learn a new truth, live it for a year before you attempt to teach it."
- \*Today, it would be an improvement to wait a week or even a day.

\*When we live without a "private world" I think our spirits begin to atrophy like an unused muscle.

\*In the WWII movie,...Saving Private Ryan...the Tom Hanks character, the leader of the army squad is finally letting his guys into some of his private world...he's telling a story about how he comforts himself by thinking about home and wife.

\*Then they ask him to explain his thoughts of home more fully he says, "No, I keep just for me."

\*When there is none of that in our relationship with God...no insights, no interactions with God..."That are just for me"

\*The authenticity of the interactions with God become suspect over time.

\*It like the woman I read about who was so busy taking pictures and videos of every moment of her children's lives, thousands of them...that she was missing her children's lives.

\*I can imagine God saying..."Wait, I did not give you that so you could look good online, or smart, or spiritual, or invite the whole world in...I gave you that so you could know me better, that was for you."

\*Of course our experience with God is to be shared...but I'm quite sure that Jesus wants some interaction with you and with me that is just for you and just for me.

\*When Jesus heals the man he will tell him to "Go straight home, avoid the village."

\*The man didn't need to be telling everyone that very same day what had happened...he needed time to process it.

\*His understanding needed to mature.

\*But first let's look at the healing itself...

\*Like with the deaf man where Jesus used "sign" language...here he uses tactile emphasis for this blind man.

\*He puts his hand on him and uses the moisture of his own spittle so the man can feel Jesus' interaction with him.

\*"Do you see anything?" Jesus asked.

-This may further indicate the man's faith was "small"

\*Not..."okay, now you can see."

\*But..."Can you see anything?"

\*He does see something...but not yet clearly.

\*But don't you think the man's heart was "thumping" in his chest at this point?

\*I'm quite sure his response was not..."Yea, I see something, but its foggy...what's the deal Jesus?"

\*No...it was breathlessly..."I can see something, I can see something...wait, I think it's people! They look like trees walking around...but yep, its people alright!"

\*Now, he is starting to hope again.

\*Jesus touches him a second time...this time the man is very attuned to the Lord's touch.

\*His expectancy factor has gone off the charts...he's not needing his friends to have faith and courage for him anymore...his own experience is enough for his own faith to take over.

\*Now he sees clearly.

\*Then healed, the man is sent straight home...just like his physical healing was gradual, likely his understanding of God's purposes in all of it will be gradual as well.

\*So...he is instructed to go home...sit with this for a while...

\*Now Jesus turns his full attention to his little squad...he takes them on a long walk from Bethsaida to Caesarea Philippi.

\*He is going to get them away from the crowds and focus like a laser beam on them.

**27 Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked them, "Who do people say I am?" 28 They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets." 29 "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" Peter answered, "You are the Christ." 30 Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him.**

\*As they walk Jesus asks them "Who do people say I am?"

\*Don't confuse this with a "desire for affirmation posed as a question."

\*We sometimes ask a question similar to this not wanting information but affirmation.

\*So, "What are people saying?..."

\*Meaning..."Do people like me, how did I do, am I okay?"

\*Jesus didn't have the need to play these kinds of games...he was fully confident in who he was.

\*This question was for their instruction not his ego.

\*They begin to answer based on their observations.

\*Stop and think about this...they were not with Jesus every second of every day for 3 years.

\*They had some time by themselves, went home, spent time with family and friends...this was not an overseas deployment...and they operated in a fairly small geographic area.

\*So when they replied...

\***“Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.”**

\*They are saying... "My mother thinks you are John"

\*"My high school buddy says you are Elijah."

\*"The leaders of my home synagogue give you credit for being a prophet, but they do not believe you are on par with Elijah."

\*These guys were no doubt experiencing some minor celebrity status.

\*They were hanging out with Jesus, the one the crowds clamored to see and the leaders grumbled against.

\*Jesus was already both famous and infamous...these guys were his entourage.

\*But they will soon find out that following Jesus is going to cost them, rather than making them famous...it will demand all that they are.

\*And when they finally understand who he is...the truly "famous" one...not just in localized time and space, but Lord of all creation...they will care very little for personal fame.

\*They will begin to live to make his name great not their own.

\*But again, that day has not yet come at this point in the narrative.

\*So, the main ideas of who Jesus is are...John, Elijah, or some lesser prophet.

\*Their ideas of who Jesus is tell us two things:

1. We can get rid of the image of Jesus as a soft spoken, soft living sort of guy...floating around in a clean white robe, hair shining with salon quality conditioner on it.

\*They think he is Elijah, or John...these guys lived rough and tumble lives...they spoke very directly...he is no pansy...he is a prophet.

2. They tell us that no one was throwing around the idea that Jesus is the Messiah. Somehow in spite of all that happened...the reality that the long awaited day of the Lord had arrived escaped them.

\*They believed Jesus was a forerunner, someone who pointed forward to the Messiah...but they did not believe he was the Messiah.

\*But Jesus is not that concerned with the ideas of the crowds...he is most interested in how the disciples view of him contrasted with the crowd's ideas.

\*The day would come when the disciples would be sent out to speak a message that would run counter to the prevailing narratives.

\*So he asked them...

**\*"Okay," "they say I'm a prophet...but "what about you, you are my closest friends...who do you say I am?"**

\*Peter pipes up..."**You are the Christ.**"

\*The Christ...the anointed one, the Messiah.

\*Jesus simply says next..."don't tell anyone."

\*Why?

\*Partly as we will see next week...Peter is "seeing Jesus as a tree walking around"

\*This is just a first touch.

\*He is seeing, but not yet clearly...its going to be incremental...a few more touches are required.

\*They do not yet understand what to tell others about Jesus...so its best if they stay quiet for the time being.

\*The day will come when they will see Jesus clearly and he will tell them "As you go, make disciples everywhere...tell everyone."

\*But on this day...they don't see Jesus clearly.

\*In addition, once it becomes clear who Jesus really is and what his mission is...it will become increasingly dangerous...

\*He is going to the cross, there is no doubt about that...but he is going according to his own time schedule, not that of someone else.

\*So from the incremental sight of the man with the physical blindness to the incremental sight of his guys with their spiritual blindness, Mark's gospel has turned the corner and is now heading straight for the Cross.

\*It is there and at the empty tomb that his guys will finally see clearly.

#### **APPLICATION:**

**\*Our growth in faith is about aligning our beliefs (minds, hearts) with what is real and true.**

1. This is internal before it becomes external...and what we are believing internally, will always find its way into our external lives.

2. Growth in believing and living what is true is most often incremental rather than exponential.

- \*Before we look at these facts...let's re-visit our introduction.
- \*We must embrace the reality behind the verbal symbols we use.
- \*When we talk about God, Jesus, the gospel...we are not just using verbal symbols to make ourselves feel a certain way.
- \*We are using verbal symbols...like J.E.S.U.S....to talk about fixed realities...
- \*Jesus...is, in the real world...the eternal, Savior of the world.
- \*So...think "real" not "symbol" as you consider these applications.
- \*Thinking "real" means you consider implications and applications, you think of potential barriers and problems, you consider what will make implementing these realities more challenging.
- \*With mere symbols...you talk, think, feel...and are done...you leave the symbols and move in the real world.
- \*With reality...you align yourself with it...or eventually it will align you with it.
- \*People talk symbols but they live substance...our faith is most often relegated to the world of symbols without substance.
- \*We must work diligently to get over this in our minds...it creates disfunction like we saw in Andy Worhol's life...a life at odds with itself.
- \*Like a spiritual auto-immune disorder...where your believing, thinking and living begin to attack each other.
- \*This is just another way of describing the "Two-story" approach to life.
- \*Upstairs "symbols", downstairs "substance"
- \*Two applications from our passage: Growth in faith is:

### **1. Always Internal before external**

- \*I don't want to belabor the whole "living to post" theme...and there is nothing inherently wrong with posting your thoughts, feelings, etc. online...or telling others.
- \*In fact, clearly its a good thing to share what God is doing in you.
- \*My point here is that we need to give attention to what is doing "in" us.
- \*A focus on the external can short-circuit the work he is wanting to do on the internal.
- \*It can corrupt our motives and thereby our growth itself is not growth...but facade, symbolism.



\*We don't want to grow in order to know and love him more, but in order to "look" a certain way to others...this is not growth.

**Matt. 6:1 “Be careful not to do your ‘acts of righteousness’ before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. 2 “So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. 3 But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, 4 so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. 5 “And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. 6 But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.**

\*Give to the needy and don't let your left hand(or Facebook) know what your right hand is doing.

\*The hypocrites (actors in a religious play) do what they do to get the applause of people...and that is all they get.

\*Nothing of substance is happening inside them.

\*When you pray...don't make a show of it...have something substantial that is just between you and God.

\*This does not suggest that public prayer is bad, Jesus did plenty of that himself...but it was balanced with his private world with God.

\*Important: if something of substance is happening internally...it will show up externally.

\*However, when the focus is "how do I look?" rather than "who am I really?" ...there will be no real change.

\*Second application from our passage: Growth in faith is:

## **2. Most often Incremental rather than exponential**

\*We hope for huge jumps, growth that comes in leaps and bounds.

\*There are certainly times for some people where they experience accelerated growth spurts...but this is only some of the time and for some people.

\*The norm is incremental...small steps of growth.

\*What happened to the disciples and this blind man was descriptive not prescriptive.

\*The gospel was being revealed at that time...we are reading of the unfolding of that revelation.

\*Now it has been revealed...it is completely unfolded to us.

\*However there is an application that can be derived from seeing how God was patient in unfolding the truth over time.

\*He often does the same for us.

\*We are prone to look for "get rich, get smart, get thin, get a degree, get spiritual...quick" schemes.

\*So if we can get to the right conference, read the right book, have the right experience, have the right mentor...my growth will accelerate.

\*I won't have to grind it out...day by day...living a normal kind of life...I will experience microwavable spiritual growth...none of this slow, pressure cooking for me.

\*We must embrace the reality of incremental growth...this is the norm.

**\*Key take aways:**

1. Don't get sidelined by a focus on symbolism without a basis in substantial reality...be relentless in asking "How do I do this? What do I think, believe, change?"

\*Do not merely "have a feeling" about God, the Scriptures, your life...and be okay with that.

\*Reality doesn't work that way...and this is reality.

\*This is real...what does that mean needs to happen?

\*It could be that you have a "feeling" about God...joy, anger, dismay...that's okay.

\*But even then, what will you do with our about that...what choice will you make?

2. Real change starts internal...pay close attention to this fact.

-Post all you want, but be sure your heart's goal is real growth...not to create a certain online image.

3. Real change is incremental...make peace with this.

-Rejoice if you experience a jump in faith, but most often you will experience a step of faith.

\*Embrace small steps of faith...there are many sayings embedded in many cultures about "long journeys and a single step."

\*This is because this is a description of the way things really work.

**\*Our journey of faith is going to small steps that are not merely symbolic in nature but full of substance.**

## SMALL GROUP NOTES

### Mark 8:22-30

#### Intro:

\*Important: Use this introductory material to start the discussion, be careful to not turn it into something negative. This is not intended to be a time to merely complain about culture but rather to have a thoughtful discussion.

\*Discuss Terry's statement that "Naming things does not make them." What does this mean? What are some examples in current culture that this applies to?

\*Do you agree or disagree with this statement..."It doesn't matter what we believe is true about the world it only matters if what we believe about the world is true."

-Why or why not?

\*What examples have you seen where "substance has become less important than symbols?"

#### Read:

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#### Discuss:

1. The man's friends brought him to Jesus which could be explained by his blindness but why do you think he didn't speak for himself once he was in the presence of Jesus?
2. This is the only "two-stage" healing recorded in Mark's gospel. Why do you think Mark included it? How does it fit in with the unfolding of the disciple's understanding?
3. Do you believe there is value in waiting before you post or present a new experience, or insight? Why or why not?
4. How might a "near real time" posting of our "inner lives" have a negative impact in some cases?
5. Why did Jesus ask the disciples what others were saying about him?
6. Why did he warn them to not tell anyone about their insight regarding him?

7. Read Matt 6:1-6

**Matt. 6:1** “Be careful not to do your ‘acts of righteousness’ before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. **2** “So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. **3** But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, **4** so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. **5** “And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. **6** But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

\*Why is it so important to Jesus that we do things that are right and that have implications for our spiritual development without concern for other's knowing about those things?

**Apply:**

1. Discuss, pray about, or just think through some ways in which your faith has become symbolism without real substance. Or if it has not, what are some ways that it could become that if you are not vigilant?
2. Real change starts internally. What are some things you can do to pay closer attention to your heart? How can you include others in your own ongoing heart examination?
3. Have you become frustrated with the pace of your own growth? Are there ways in which you are tempted to look for "quick" paths to growth? How can you ensure that your small steps are not merely symbolic in nature but tied to the real world in real ways?

**THE GOSPEL OF**

# MARK



**Mark 8:22-30**

**“FOR EVEN THE  
SON OF MAN  
DID NOT COME  
TO BE SERVED,  
BUT TO SERVE,  
AND TO GIVE  
HIS LIFE AS A  
RANSOM FOR  
MANY.”**

**MARK 10:45**

**J. STILL**





**“ART IS ANYTHING  
YOU CAN GET  
AWAY WITH”**

*Andy Warhol*

**We do not live in a world that is merely  
a collection of symbols...we name  
things, but naming them does not make  
them.**



**It doesn't matter what we believe is true about the world, it only matters if what we believe about the world is true.**

**Mark 8:22-26** They came to Bethsaida, and some people brought a blind man and begged Jesus to touch him. He took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village. When he had spit on the man's eyes and put his hands on him, Jesus asked, "Do you see anything?" He looked up and said, "I see people; they look like trees walking around." Once more Jesus put his hands on the man's eyes. Then his eyes were opened, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly. Jesus sent him home, saying, "Don't go into the village."

**Mark 8:27-30** Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked them, “Who do people say I am?” They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.” “But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?” Peter answered, “You are the Christ.” Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him.

**Our growth in faith is about aligning our beliefs (minds, hearts, wills) with what is real and true.**

- 1. Always internal before external**
- 2. Usually incremental, not exponential**

**Matt. 6:1-4 “Be careful not to do your ‘acts of righteousness’ before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. “So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you**

**Matt. 6:5-6 “And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.**

- 1. Always internal before external**
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**Substance, not just symbols**

***Be relentless in asking... "How do I do this?"***

**Internal before external**

***Pay careful attention to your own heart***

**Incremental is the norm**

***Make peace with the reality of small  
steps***

