

CONVERSATIONS – MARK 8 – THE BLIND MAN AT BETHSAIDA

God spoke us into existence and we— created in his image— were created to speak and converse

As much as ZOOM and technology helped carry us through COVID, we should be mindful that technology can also serve as a hindrance as we come together again.

“Reclaiming Conversation” by **Sherry Turkle**. She shared that she found through much study that real, intimate, authentic conversation usually doesn’t start until 7 minutes into a conversation. The issue with our devices arises when they interrupt conversation. Because a conversation interrupted frequently doesn’t develop more slowly... it just stays shallow as each side makes room for the other to tend to their device. The end result? We never eclipse the 7 minute mark, and never connect in intimate conversation.

“Digital connections and the sociable robot may offer the illusion of companionship without the demands of friendship... Our networked life allows us to hide from each other, even as we are tethered to each other. We’d rather text than talk.”

We’ve learned to write our thoughts in texts and comments and alike and present ourselves edited and polished. The issues that arises is if you take away connecting face to face and even voice to voice... can you really connect heart to heart in the same way?

Authenticity sparks intimacy. Without honest authenticity true intimacy is impossible. And if we punt **authenticity**, can we truly reclaim conversation?

And again, we weren’t just created for conversation and connection with each other. We were created for intimate connection and conversation with God.

I think of the fact it says of Moses in the Old Testament that the Israelites would watch him step into the **tabernacle** to talk “face to face” with God.

John 1:14 reads, literally- **“The Word became flesh and tabernacled among us.”**

HEBREWS 4 (MSG) *Now that we know what we have—Jesus, this great High Priest with ready access to God—let’s not let it slip through our fingers. We don’t have a priest who is out of touch with our reality. He’s been through weakness and testing, experienced it all—all but the sin. So let’s walk right up to him and get what he is so ready to give. Take the mercy, accept the help.*

See zooming and facetimeing – there’s an app for that.

Establishing a relationship with God so intimate that some would call face to face – there was a sacrifice for that.

MARK 8:22-26 - PRAY

If this picture of our meek and mild, loving and gracious savior spitting in a vulnerable man’s face who literally couldn’t see it coming doesn’t give make you say “time out” ...your imagination is broken.

The context of the story in the greater context of Mark is important.

The first half is about **WHO** Jesus is – the Messiah.

The second half is about **HOW** he walks this out – the Messiah would have to suffer.

And right in the pivot here in Mark 8, in fact right after this episode with the blind man...

Jesus asks his disciples: ***“Who do people say that I am?”***

MARK 8:28-34

But the vision the Jews had clung to for *centuries* was one of the coming Messiah ushering in a national kingdom that would displace the Romans. The Jews and Peter and the disciples seem impossibly dense as you read the Gospels, as they are seemingly not able to grasp Jesus would suffer and die no matter how many ways he tells them. It's not that they are dumb, but that they were all but blinded by hundreds of years of built up expectation. They couldn't see any possibility of their Messiah going out like Jesus would, any more than this blind man could see his surroundings.

This section is bookended by the healing of blind men, starting with this instance in Mark 8. Coincidence? I don't think so.

And on either side of the account of the blind man in Mark 8 that we just read, is an account of the disciples seeming blindness to Jesus' purpose and failure to comprehend.

Jesus had just said to his disciples in Mark 8:18 – ***“Do you have eyes but fail to see, and ears but fail to hear? And don't you remember?”***

So this episode isn't solely about the individual blind man.

The brief conversation Jesus has with him is in the midst of an ongoing conversation He is having with his disciples about HOW he would be the Messiah.

Spitting in the face of somebody was a disgraceful act.

Just moments later Jesus was about to give the disciples shocking news: he was going to die a disgraceful death, handed over to the Romans by the high priests and religious leaders who would spit in Jesus' face.

Spitting in the face of somebody was like a slap in the face.

Jesus' statement that He would be killed in Jerusalem was also like a slap in the face.

So much so that Peter outright rebukes Jesus. He had just confessed that Jesus was the Messiah.

The idea that the long awaited Messiah would become a curse by crucifixion was disgraceful.

But that wasn't all Jesus was saying... In this exchange Jesus isn't just saying *he* would face persecution and insult. *His disciples* should expect the same.

In his ongoing conversation with his followers, in verse 34, right after this episode Jesus says: ***Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.”***

God is honest with us. He's authentic. Because authenticity creates intimacy, and our infinite God wants to be in intimate relationship with us.

But following God takes denying ourselves, even to the point of occasional discomfort. When trouble comes our faith gets flustered because we think trouble shouldn't be here. And if trouble lingers or if problems turn permanent then something must be wrong. So we become obsessed with the why.

Is all this trouble because I am missing the mark? Is my life off the rails?

Or... is God off the job? Is his love not what I thought it was?

Or do I just lack the requisite faith to experience breakthrough and deliverance?

We think *"this can't be of God."*

But Jesus would say – I prepared you for this. And I'm with you in it.

Purpose might prove painful.

Ministry is going to be messy.

But trouble doesn't mean your life is off the rails or you've missed your purpose.

It's par for the course.

Parenting— one gift you can give a child is adjusting expectations and providing a script. Especially adopted children from kids from unstable backgrounds or a history of trauma - you have to account for fear and inappropriate reactions when they face a new and challenging situation. The script builds in expectations before they step into a situation. It removes the fear of the unknown, and can prevent stress when the situation unfolds.

Jesus, in effect, is walking this out with his disciples like a good parent with their kids...

What is about to happen might be jarring, uncomfortable, and troubling.

But I'll never leave or forsake you. The Holy Spirit will be with you.

And on a much grander scale, Jesus is preparing his future followers- us included- for the reality to come.

There will be as much pain as fame this side of Heaven,

There will be trouble to go along with triumph.

There will be discomfort as you walk in calling.

He's being authentic on the front end so no trouble can derail the intimacy he wants to have with us. We don't have to pull back and question "where is God in this?"

Because we remember he didn't just foretell it, he promised to be with us in it.

"Can you see anything now?" How the man answered would determine the rest of his life. Technically this guy wasn't blind anymore. He was more like legally blind. He could see. But people looked like trees.

1 Corinthians 13:12 speaks to our present predicament this side of eternity when it says:

"We don't yet see things clearly. We're squinting in a fog, peering through a mist"

If we are perfectly honest, cloudy spiritual vision afflicts every Christian to some degree.

None of us sees as clearly as we would like to. No one sees life with crystal clear clarity.

What this blind man experienced physically we all walk in spiritually.
All of us have spiritual nearsightedness to one degree or another. Blind spots. Blurry vision.
Areas of our life that aren't fully developed. Spiritually or emotionally.

The problem in most cases is that we don't like to admit it.
We don't like to be honest about it. We don't like to ask for help.

But this is the first time we see Jesus ask the recipient of his miracle about its effectiveness.
Christ wasn't seeking information. He was seeking an honest answer.
Ultimately, what brought this man complete healing was **HONESTY.**

If honesty is what brings this man healing... I have to ask myself... Am I being honest with God?

"Ignoring our emotions is turning our back on reality. Listening to our emotions ushers us into reality. And reality is where we meet God. . . . Emotions are the language of the soul. They are the cry that gives the heart a voice. . . ."

On social media and in our culture at large we edit, crop, filter, and forfeit authenticity.
It's the digital expression of a question that has always haunted man from the fall:
What would they think if they saw the real me?

In selfie culture we try to post pictures without blemishes.
We end up filtered and edited, but never authentic.
Never let them see you angry.
Never let them see you cry.

God can handle your raw feelings. He can handle your raw honesty about them.
I truly believe he'd rather us explode in prayer than turn inward and implode apart from him.

Never let them see your mess.
Never let them see you sweat.
Never let them see you bleed.
But John says in his letter to the Church:

"If we claim to have no sin we are only fooling ourselves."
Or I've heard is said in a lyric: ***"You quote the devil when you say you're OK"***

A beautiful truth of the Gospel in which Jesus died for us while we were still sinners:
it's OK to not be OK.

Spiritual maturity doesn't mean perfection, it means recognizing these areas and submitting them to God. In actuality, spiritual maturity isn't graduating from our need for grace, but a growing awareness in the many ways we need it and acting honestly and accordingly.

I often ask Raj – ***"you got it or you need help?"***
Raj is mostly non-verbal – but in the past weeks he's said "DOT IT."
And he's also said "ELP."

For Raj, asking for help is growth cognitively .
Learning to ask God for help is growth spiritually... and dare I say psychologically.

Psychologists would tell you that we're so bad at asking for help for three reasons:

- 1.) *we're hard wired to want to do it ourselves and be independent.*
- 2.) *we're terrified of surrendering control.*
- 3.) *we're afraid of being told no.*

Neuro-scientists would tell you that reaching out for help can trigger the same brain regions as physical pain due to those factors.

And **social psychologist** and author **Heidi Grant** found that we wildly underestimate the odds that others will help us.

And those are imperfect people.
How much more can we go to our perfect God for help?

But the enemy loves for us to get paralyzed by this lie that God is looking for perfect people.
But God isn't looking for perfect people, he's primarily looking for honest people.

As we opened with Hebrews 4: *We don't have a priest who is out of touch with our reality...*
SO TAKE THE MERCY. ACCEPT THE HELP.

But here when Jesus helps we see Him lay hands on the man twice for him to be healed and see.
Was it because this man's blindness was a particularly hard case?
Was it because Jesus tried and failed the first time?
What is going on? Again... it points to the disciples.
"Do you see anything?" prefaces the question Jesus would ask Peter:
"Who do you say that I am?"

Peter's correct confession that Jesus is the Christ reflects the "sight" of the disciples. Peter's confession shows that they "see" this truth about Jesus. They were believers in Jesus, the Messiah. But they didn't yet understand the path Jesus was taking... and the path he was calling them on. They are like the blind man when Jesus placed His hands on him the first time.

The question that remained is would they, deny themselves, take up their cross,
and walk the path of discipleship?

The question remains for us - *will we?*

"FIX YOUR EYES" ... on Jesus: *Because his heart was focused on the joy of knowing that you would be his, he endured the agony of the cross and conquered its humiliation, and now sits exalted at the right hand of the throne of God!*

Jesus is at the right hand of the Father. God is powerfully infinite but he wants to be profoundly intimate. But there's no intimacy without authenticity. We have to come out from our filters and fig leaves and lay it all out before God... **TAKE THE MERCY. ACCEPT THE HELP.**