

SEEING IS HEALING --
"Seeing Christ at the Table"

February 7, 2021; 9:00 am

Mark 1:29-39

Congregational UCC, Buena Vista, CO

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Jesus Heals Many at Simon's House

²⁹ As soon as they^[a] left the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. ³⁰ Now Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told him about her at once. ³¹ He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them.

³² That evening, at sunset, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. ³³ And the whole city was gathered around the door. ³⁴ And he cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and he would not permit the demons to speak, **because they knew him.**

A Preaching Tour in Galilee

³⁵ In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed. ³⁶ And Simon and his companions hunted for him. ³⁷ When they found him, they said to him, "**Everyone is searching for you.**" ³⁸ He answered, "Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do." ³⁹ And he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.

I. SEEING IS HEALING—Series for February

We have been journeying with Jesus since Christmas—from the manger, to the magi; to the river, as he and we were named and claimed as Beloved; back to the water to be called as disciples and given a purpose in life and a place to belong in community.

As we traveled, we asked the question: Where is God When Life Gets Hard? And we found God in so many places. In the rough

waters with us. In the creaturely presence of a Dove and a breath and the wind. Calling to us to go deeper, into the middle of the water in faith.

We found the Holy in the Sweet Spot moments that sometimes come in most unexpected ways, places, and times. In the "nudges at night," or the face of one *we thought* was a stranger who turned out to be a friend we just hadn't made yet.

Today we begin a new series for February called "**Seeing is Healing.**"

We consider the lenses we look at the Divine, one another, and the world through, and reflect on how we might *open our eyes more*, take off our blinders, clean and polish up those lenses to see more clearly. A little like the idea of taking on a "Beginner's Mind." We will don "exploratory eyes."

Richard Rohr gives us the "why" we do this: "*We must never presume that we see. We must always be ready to see anew.*" (Rohr, p. 31, EB)

We will walk the Journey with Jesus as he begins his ministry with "A Preaching Tour in Galilee" into the highways and byways, the healings and casting out demons, the teaching and preaching, comforting and table-turning that he did during his time on earth.

We will ask ourselves how we might look at Jesus' message and ministry in a new light. How we might see others and ourselves *through* Christ's eyes, and might turn over some tables in our minds to find new understandings and insights.

For Jesus was all about bringing "sight to the blind" in his healing ministry—but not just *physical* sight. Blindness in the scriptures and in Jesus' teachings and healings are about **spiritual blinders** that we put on and *keep* on—a refusal to see deeper and the inability to see with the eyes of love and compassion.

When those blinders come off; when the eyes of the blind are opened, when people truly want to see and to seek wholeness, healing happens! In powerful ways—in individual lives *and* in communities! So, here we go. Let's put on our "Insight Spectacles" and see what we might notice that we haven't before.

II. SEEING SCRIPTURE ANEW

We will start with today's scripture reading.

This is the very first day of Jesus' ministry—and it's all in one day! He gets right down to it! Doesn't miss a beat. Doesn't miss a thing around him—people need him, and he has a message and a movement to bring. Jesus was very aware of his surroundings. He saw people and circumstances for what they truly were. He saw suffering and need, joy and sorrow, all wrapped into every scene.

Jesus and the disciples start the day in a most appropriate way—they go to church! While there, Jesus is "greeted" by some evil spirits who *see* him as someone out of the ordinary. His teaching is heard as *different* from all the usual scribes, and he is seen and heard by the crowd as "*one having authority*."

Jesus also *sees* the demons for who they *are*, and the fact that they recognize him. In that, Jesus sees the need to quiet them so he can be about his mission. After he shushes them up, he sees the need of so many for healing; for restoration to fullness of life in community, and he responds. He sees Peter's mother-in-law lying very sick in bed—not only suffering from physical ailments, but lonely and separated from her community and family life. He heals her in every way, so she is restored to her family and returns to the party.

And then, Jesus sees something else. The need for Sabbath. For healing rest and renewal, prayer and time apart.

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"**Everyone is searching for you.**" ³⁸ He answered, "Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do."

It seems his spiritual nap was not very long, for the disciples also saw the need of others and searched him out!

III. COMMUNION THROUGH NEW EYES

Further along in his ministry, but probably that first day too, Jesus gathers his friends around him to share a meal. Those meals are ordinary sometimes, and other times miraculous! Like when 5000 plus are fed on a hillside with seemingly few supplies.

A special kind of meal that Jesus enjoyed with his friends—an Agape meal—is what we celebrate today on this first Sunday of the month. So, we look at even that ancient ritual through new eyes as well, and see what we hadn't considered before.

Where might we gain a new understanding of this seemingly routine ritual, we might have practiced our entire lives? How can we apply a new way of approaching the sacred ritual we call Holy Communion, and enrich our spiritual lives?

It's actually called many things:

The Lord's Supper. The Lord's Table. The Eucharist. Breaking Bread, Sharing Cup. An Ordinance, a Rite, a commandment, a Gift. A sacrament. A sacred sign of God's self-giving. The Joyful Feast of the People of God!

IV. SOMBER MOMENT OR CELEBRATION?

When I was growing up in the American Baptist Church, we observed "The Lord's Supper" on the first Sunday of every month. In my church, which my mother always pined—leaned "awfully conservative" for an ABC church, it was an "Ordinance"—Something in the rule book—we were supposed to do every month.

It was very somber, and the male Deacons (only male) carried out their duties very seriously, walking in formation, passing out the trays—first with the little square wafers that did not taste very good to my young mouth but were better than the round, not-very-bread-like wafers I experienced in catholic churches as an adult.

Then, the trays of cups, much like we have here at CUCC. Very clear that this was grape juice only and not wine! While the deacons did their sacred, somber duty of passing out the elements, we would sing in our pews.

The words were printed in the bulletin so we didn't have to fumble with hymnals while trying to hold onto the wafer and then the little cup (not an easy feat for a child or an adult with shaky hands like my Dad who always risked spilling a little juice on his choir robe before he got it to his mouth!)

These songs were somber as well! I so well remember the overarching message: "Communion is a time to reflect on what a sinner you are." The songs told us that clearly: "Just as I am without one plea," a lowly sinner.... "For such a worm as I...."

But for Jesus dying, I was a hopelessly scarred, bad person, even at age eight, when I first started to grasp what I was singing. I always loved to sing, and was so glad we did sing hymns during Communion, and didn't have to just sit there and wait impatiently for everything to be passed out.

But, even at an early age, I sensed a disconnect. Was I already really that bad? Was it important to Jesus that I sit and somberly reflect on all my guilt before I could enjoy the bread and cup, partake of communion with Christ and others around me?

At some point in my youth, the pastor and music minister, who was his son, decided we would *not* sing hymns during Communion. Paul would just play the organ. I missed the chance to sing more and asked about it—disappointed. But then,

it gradually started to dawn on me, that I didn't miss this "guilt reflection time" every month. This conscripted time to feel bad about myself and hope that pleased Jesus.

In Seminary, I had a powerful Epiphany about Communion—called Eucharist in my ecumenical seminary. It was a whole 'nother thing! A different animal! Eucharist was suddenly a celebration! With inspiring music: One Bread, One Body! This is the Joyful Feast of the People of God!

This was most definitely *not* a time set aside every month to sing guilt and sin songs and feel appropriately bad about myself and how I'd failed Jesus, but a time every day—yes! I sometimes went every morning to Eucharist in the Chapel—hungry for this new experience of the presence of God!—to be nourished, fed, uplifted, and sing of the joyful gifts of bread and cup, presence and enfolding Spirit.

I have looked at Communion with new eyes ever since, and approach the Table of the Lord with a completely different understanding than the ritual of my youth.

V. SEEING CHRIST AT THE TABLE

In our worship service a couple weeks back, Merilee shared a prayer by Thom Shuman that contained a line about Communion that jumped out and grabbed me.

Prayer of the Day - Thom Shumann

You save us by your grace,
so we may joyfully serve
our sisters and brothers;
**you slide over
to make room for us
at your Table;**
you step into
our shadowed lives
to take us by the hand
and lead us into the light.

Healing Word: we give you thanks!

Did you catch that? **you slide over to make room for us at your Table.** Throughout history, churches and denominations of all brands, have *constructed* all sorts of *rules* about who is welcome to the Table of the Lord and who is not. “Fencing the Table” was one of many manifestations of this tendency—back in the Pilgrim days.

Someone who hadn’t gone to Confession recently could not commune. Someone who was seen at a bar the night before or leaving someone’s house they were not married to, under dark of night, could not approach the Table. Even someone in a different “branch” of the same Christian denomination might not be “communed” because they were not sporting the right label.

What if we’ve had this *wrong* all these centuries? What if it was never OUR place as humans, or good church people to make those stipulations? To decide *who* was worthy of a place at the Table; allowed to Commune; invited to approach the holy altar?

What if Jesus turns *this* table on its head too? Upends our ingrained ideas of who is *in* and who is *out*? Who is welcomed right in with no hesitation, and who has to go through many hoops to pull up a chair? What if Jesus literally slides over to make room for US at HIS Table and expects us to do the same for others without stipulation? That Jesus makes the Guest List! Not us. Not the Church. That Jesus invites us and every other guest and it’s not up to us to decide on that list whatsoever?!

What if we saw those seats, those places set at the table with a newly-opened set of eyes? Looked across the Table at each person, and down the side at each face there, and saw the face of Christ? The guests on the same lists as we are, humbly invited—no one ranking above or below another, or any more worthy than ourselves?

What if we saw Christ in the faces and hands of the ones serving the meal as well? Saw Peter’s mother-in-law, newly healed and back among us? What if we practiced that new kind of seeing anything we gathered around a table—in a restaurant, on a patio, in a home?

For in Jesus’ eyes, those bringing the feast are not of a lower level of humanity than those being served. All are souls Jesus has invited, and just like us, Jesus slides over to make a place for them too! How and where do we need to make room at the Table like Jesus does, but seeing with new eyes and truly seeing others?

We sing “One Bread, One Body, one Lord of all”—THAT’s what that song is about! Seeing, hearing, rubbing elbows one with another—all honored and invited guests. Invited by Grace, honored by the mere fact that we are human together. Seeing the face of Christ in each other guest—no matter where they have come from and how they have come to be there.

Communion—when we slide over next to Jesus and our own brothers and sisters. Seeing Jesus, others, and ourselves in a whole new light. Taking in Christ’s presents (bread and cup) and Presence in tangible form. Letting it fill us, flow into us, into every vein and pore, so that it can flow OUT of us—Christ’s love and healing vision—into a hurting world.

A hungry and thirsty world that needs our *small* acts of caring done with *great* love. Let us Commune in that Spirit. Amen.