

“All I Really Need to Know I Did Not Learn in Kindergarten”

Mark 8:22-26

Preached by Dr. Robert F. Browning, Pastor
Smoke Rise Baptist Church
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Robert Fulgham’s book took the world by storm in 1986. All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten was the catchy title. The title of the book was taken from the first essay in which Fulgham listed lessons normally learned in kindergarten classrooms and explained how the world would be better if adults adhered to the same basic rules as children.

As interesting as the title and concept are, I am confident that even Fulgham would agree that we need to be lifelong learners. There is never a time when we can relax and say that we know all we need to know.

I believe our text makes this point, too. This is not only a story about a blind man being healed, but it is also about opening our eyes to a greater understanding of life and faith. Look at it with me.

When some friends of a blind man approached Jesus and begged for his help, Jesus took the man by the hand and led him outside the village of Bethsaida. He spit on the man’s eyes, put his hands on him and asked him if he could see. The man told Jesus that he saw people, but they looked like walking trees. So, Jesus touched him again and this time the man was able to see clearly. Jesus sent him home, instructing him not to go into the village.

This story raises many questions, some of which I’ll address in this sermon. Why did Jesus lead this man outside the village before healing him? Why did he have to touch him twice to fully restore his sight? After healing him, why did Jesus tell the man not to go back into the village, but to go home?

What interests me the most, however, is Mark 8:25. After Jesus touched the man the second time, Mark records, “Then his eyes were opened, his sight was restored and **he saw everything clearly.**” I am intrigued by the fact that this man’s eyesight was only partially restored after Jesus’ first touch. It wasn’t until Jesus touched him again that his sight was completely restored and he saw things clearly. What was Mark’s message to his readers, including us? Let me share some of my impressions.

There are times in life when we don’t see very clearly. This man did not. It appears that he once had sight but something happened to take it away because Mark says his sight was restored. In addition, he knew what people and trees looked like when he described what he saw after the first touch.

I wonder what robbed him of his sight. Chances are it was a disease that was the result of poor sanitation. That was fairly common in that culture as it is in many Third World countries today.

What prevents us from seeing clearly, though? It could be inexperience, immaturity or ignorance. We can be blinded by ambition, greed, lust for power or the desire for pleasure. Stress, anger, false teachers, misplaced priorities or the world’s slick marketing of the values we should possess can rob us of our sight. There is no shortage of things that can cloud our vision.

What are you struggling to see clearly and what has interfered with your ability to do so? It seems to me that identifying the reason is the first step to seeing better. However, we need to go beyond this initial step.

We need help from others in order to see clearly. This blind man certainly did. He needed friends and Jesus. Without them, he would have been blind the rest of his life.

Who helped you to see more clearly? Who came to your aid when you lost your way, dealt with a critical problem, faced a frightening challenge, had a crucial decision to make or were struggling to understand life and faith?

Many people have helped me along my journey and I am humbled and grateful. Author Keith Miller influenced me in the early years of my ministry and he comes to mind because of the title of one of his earliest books, A Second Touch. You'll recognize that this title was inspired by today's text.

He shared with his readers a new perspective on life that he was formulating and embracing because of what he was learning. Relationships, servanthood, authenticity, love, grace, acceptance, faith, struggle and journey became words by which he wanted to live. Living in the present, seeing each day as a gift and making the most of every opportunity to make the world better became his priorities.

Miller writes, "The focus of life was almost imperceptibly changing from the distant horizon of tomorrow or next month to the immediate present, the now. I saw so much of my life had been spent in a world of unreality. I was either regretting or reliving incidents and relationships in my past or I was envisioning great conquests or possible tragedies in the future.

Now I can see that the past is only a dream. I cannot affect it or change it. And the future is equally unreal, since it does not yet even exist. As a matter of fact, I realized that the only real time there is, or ever has been in which to live and act is now, the present moment.

No decision, no birth, no death, nothing ever happened in the future or a past moment, only in a present one. I had filled so many of the present moments of my life with the unreality of the past or future. The blinding introspection in which I had spent so much time had again and again blurred the intensity of my attention from seeing the actual opportunities and relationships which stood waiting before my eyes. I had marched into the future looking straight ahead, passing by the unconsciously searching eyes of those people beside the road which I was traveling."

Those few paragraphs led to new perspectives for me. I vowed to value the journey rather than become obsessed with trying to reach a destination. I made a commitment to see every person and situation as opportunities filled with potential for sharing encouragement, healing and hope.

Have I always done this? No. Like Miller, I find that "the discipline of living in the now is the most difficult I know." But I keep trying.

Who opened your eyes to the meaning and purpose of life? Whose help do you need now in order to see more clearly? Are you groping and stumbling in the dark because you have too much pride to ask for help or don't know where to turn? How long are you going to try to make it on your own?

This morning, I want to encourage you in the strongest way I know to seek counsel and help. Study the scriptures. Pray. Seek input from those who do. Don't continue to hurt yourself and others by fumbling around in the dark. It is not necessary. Help is available.

How I have appreciated C.S. Lewis' confession. "My own eyes are not enough for me. I must see through the eyes of others." This is wise advice.

Don't become impatient as you reach out to others for help. On the other hand, don't become impatient with those that are looking to you for a deeper understanding of life. Obtaining knowledge, wisdom, insight and maturity takes time, effort and discipline. It requires an open mind and a willingness to learn. Restoring sight and clarifying vision occur through a process as Mark implies in this story.

I am impressed by the fact that Jesus and this man were not content with the results of the first touch. Neither was satisfied with his partial vision. Both wanted a better outcome and continued until it came.

This tells me that learning occurs in stages and I need to seek, inquire, explore, search and struggle to understand what I need to know that can make a difference in my life and those around me. Nowhere is this better seen than the passage that follows our text.

Look at the placement of this story in Mark. It sets the stage for what is to follow at Caesarea Philippi and Peter's grand confession of faith in Christ. After asking the disciples who

the people thought he was, Jesus asked, "But what about you? Who do you say that I am?" Peter replied, "You are the Christ."

However, when Jesus told Peter about the suffering that he must endure as the anointed one, Peter rebuked him. He could not understand what Jesus was talking about, refused to believe him and corrected him. In other words, Peter saw a little, but not enough. He understood some things but there was more, much more, that he did not. As a result, he needed a second touch, and probably a third and fourth and tenth and Jesus patiently provided them.

It is not enough to declare what we know. We must also ask what we don't know and never be content until we discover it.

What are we to do with what we learn when our vision becomes clearer? I think we need to share it with those around us that may be groping in the dark.

"Don't go into the village," Jesus told the healed man. Why? Evidently he didn't live in the village but outside of it. In the village, he would very likely be exploited by faith healers that preyed on sick people. They might cut a deal with him and claim that they healed him and could heal others. This was not uncommon.

More than likely, what Jesus had in mind was that this healed man needed to go home and quietly go about helping others where he lived. He needed to take his newfound abilities and put them to good use with those he knew best that needed him.

I like what this says to us. As our understanding grows, we need to share what we are learning with those closest to us. Parents need to teach children. Grandparents need to instruct grandchildren. Neighbors need to be good role models. The people around us are not the only ones that we need to help, but it is where we are to begin. As the slogan says, "Bloom where you are planted." Be the enlightening and healing presence of Christ where you live and are known.

On my recent trip to Israel, the group gathered each morning after breakfast for devotion and prayer. A significant portion of the time was spent in silence, preparing for the day. This was in stark contrast to the anything-but-silent world that awaited us.

When it was time to go into that noisy world, our silence was broken by singing an upbeat song that put pep in our step and a huge smile on our face. One of the songs we sang to the top of our lungs as we made that transition was written, arranged and produced by Johnny Nash and a number one hit on the Pop Charts for four weeks in 1972, "I Can See Clearly Now." It is a song, many believe, about hope, courage and recovery for individuals who experience adversity and overcome it.

*I can see clearly now, the rain has gone.
I can see all obstacles in my way.
Gone are the dark clouds that had me blind.
It's gonna be a bright, bright, sun-shiny day.*

Wouldn't it be great if this could happen in real life? With God's help and others, I think it can!