

A SECOND LOOK

“He took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village; and when he had put saliva on his eyes and laid his hands on him, he asked him, ‘Can you see anything?’ And the man looked up and said, ‘I can see people, but they look like trees walking.’ Then Jesus laid his hands on his eyes again; and he looked intently and his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly”

Mark 8:23-25

Can you **see** anything? I see people but they look like trees walking. How do we make sense of a passage where our Savior **fails** to completely heal on the first try? And what is it that **we** see?

Mark has always been my favorite Gospel. It’s the shortest, which helps, but the Jesus portrayed in Mark is such a *remarkable* combination of divinity and humanity that I find him irresistible. My professor in college called Mark the superhero Gospel. He pointed to all of the healings and miracles that Jesus does in such a short span of time, but the real clincher, for him, was the fact that no one truly got who Jesus was. Kind of like Clark Kent.

In a class on Jesus with this particular professor, we studied the historical Jesus, we explored Christology, we read the scriptures as literature, and we discussed the significance of Jesus as the Christ for religious communities. At the end of the fifteen weeks, we had to write a four page paper answering the question: who is Jesus? Four pages. Jesus. **Fifteen** weeks of reading and discussing and we got four pages.

It was one of those assignments where when you first get it the daggers in your eyes come out and shoot straight at your professor – and the professor *knows it*, and he *likes* that he got under your skin with this question. And then you go home and spend more hours than you should beating your head into any hard surface. There is **no way** to answer this question. **No** place to start, and certainly no way to do it in four pages. People write **volumes** on this question. And we had **four** pages.

I don’t know who Jesus is. I don’t know who Jesus was. Of all the members of the Trinity, I get Jesus the least. He makes **no sense** to me.

And I had four pages to work it out.

And then I remembered this passage. My favorite. My favorite because Jesus **spits** on someone. My favorite because it reminds me that we **don’t** see clearly the first time around. Even with the help of our savior, we don’t get it the first time we try.

When I was six, God was **so** good. God was just like my dad. Fair and gentle and loving. God sang me to sleep with songs like ‘*you* are my sunshine.’ God lived in a world much like the world of the care bears. Up in the clouds. Castles. Slides. Like a massive playground.

When I got to middle school God was calling me out. God was an activist, calling me to mission trips and to feed the poor and to love everyone. By high school my God was much like Job’s: far

beyond my grasp. Seemingly absent. Unwilling or unable to answer my deepest questions. In college my God was rational and feminist. In seminary my God seems to be everywhere.

But **my God** is not like your God. And **your God** is not quite my God. And sometimes they are **so similar** that we can be the best of friends. And sometimes they are **so different** that I just think you are wrong. **My God** is loving and **my God** is inclusive and **my God** thinks **so very little** about judgment. And if **your God** doesn't love me for me and if **your God** keeps people out and if **your God** tells **you** who is saved and who isn't, then we are **not** speaking of the same God. And **my God** is right.

Except then there is **this** story. A story where even when someone encounters the living Christ, they still don't see clearly the first time around. Indeed, the healing powers of Christ are not enough. The man has to look intently for himself. Perhaps the issue is not how Jesus fails, but how we fail.

We live in a divided denomination and in divided churches where more often than not it seems like we must be talking about different Gods. But our faith tells us otherwise. Our faith tells us that there is just one God and three manifestations and many ways to see the holiness around us. When our visions diverge the first time, we would do well to look again and to look intently. For often we see trees the first time around rather than people, **even** if we have encountered the living Christ in our own life.