

Sermon
March 8, 2020
Sarah Sams
Overbrook Presbyterian Church
2nd Sunday of Lent

Note: This sermon was preached by a Resting Elder, Sarah Sams.
She filled in on this date for pastors Bill and Mary Gause, who were both sick with the flu.

Mark 8:22-26

²²They came to Bethsaida. Some people brought a blind man to him and begged him to touch him. ²³He 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?" ²⁴And the man looked up and said, "I can see people, but they look like trees, walking." ²⁵Then Jesus laid his hands on his eyes again; and he looked intently and his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly. ²⁶Then he sent him away to his home, saying, "Do not even go into the village."

Some of you know that I participate in a wellness program for Pastors of the PCUSA in a program called CREDO.

When I was first asked to prepare a meditation for CREDO I was a bit lost. Writing sermons is not something I do every week. But I was told to "talk about something you know". I first landed with Mary and Martha because I'm a pretty typical Martha... doing, doing, doing... But then as a physician I thought that, of course, healing would be the topic. There are lots of passages in the Bible about healing ... The women who had been bleeding and touched Jesus robe, the man at the pool of Bethesda who was told to take up his palate and walk, ...but when I came across this one it spoke to me in a very different way. In this passage before Jesus did his healing, he took the man by the hand and let him out of the town.... Let's explore that a bit.

Growing up in Iowa one of my favorite movies was Field of Dreams. This year happens to be the 30th anniversary of that movie so I was able to see it again on the Big Screen at a retro movie series that they had here in Columbus. When I saw the movie for **the first time** 30 years ago I was at a very different place in my life. So this time, as I watched, some very different themes popped out at me.

Let me remind you of the movie... Ray Kinsella is an Iowa Farmer who is struggling to make his mortgage payments on the farm. He starts hearing a voice saying "If you build it they will come". Ray was distracted by bills, mortgages, foreclosure... but somehow he listened to that message, not knowing why but knowing there was a bigger purpose. He thought it had something to do with Shoeless Joe Jackson. He plowed up a portion of his field... his livelihood... and built a baseball field. Initially nothing happened. People thought he was CRAZY. His brother-in-law, Mark, the banker, tried to get him to throw in the towel

and sell the farm. Then Ray and his wife had the same dream that he was in Fenway park with Terrance Mann. He knew he had to investigate what that message meant. He left his family at home to search for the meaning. He traveled to meet up with people who could help him interpret this message..... He went to Boston to meet Terrance Mann, the author who had written about Ray's Father John Kinsella. Together at Fenway park, Ray and Terrance get another message. They head to Chisholm, Minnesota, to find Archie "Moonlight" Graham... in talking to townspeople they find that Dr. Graham had been the beloved Family Doctor in that town for years before he passed away. But as they walked around town Ray and Terrance see Dr. Graham walking down the street. They talk to him about his short baseball career. They try unsuccessfully to get him to come back to Iowa with them to play on this special baseball field but he refuses....yet driving back to Iowa they come upon a young man on the road who needs a ride, ... it is the young Archie "moonlight" Graham.

Ray returns to the farm, to his family, with Terrance Mann and Moonlight Graham in tow.... to find out that while they were gone other players have come. But not everyone can see these baseball players having fun on this Field of Dreams. Ray, his wife Annie, their daughter Karin, and Terrance Mann can see them... but Brother in law, Mark, can only see a baseball field, built in a cornfield, that isn't producing income to pay the mortgage on that farm. Mark's eyes were not yet opened to this new idea....

The most touching scene for me in watching this movie 30 years after the original showing... after I had become a physician... was when Moonlight Graham gets to fulfill the dream that he always had... to hit against a major league pitcher. Facing Chicago White Sox pitcher Eddie

Cicotte, the young Archie Graham drove in a run by slapping a sacrifice fly to right field.

But then Mark, not being able to see what was really happening, trying to make a point at how crazy this was to sit and look at an empty field... accidentally knocks Karin off the bleachers while she was eating a hotdog. Lying there choking, Moonlight Graham comes to the edge of the field, knowing that if he crosses the gravel to reach the girl and save her, his baseball career is over. As he steps across, he becomes the adult Dr. Graham, and saves the child.... Mark's eyes are now opened. And Moonlight Graham knew that his true calling in life was to be that doctor. Messages aren't always clear right away... sometimes we have to step away from our day to day to be able to see things clearly. Ray Kinsella had to step away from the pressures of his mortgage, his planting and plowing... Dr. Graham had to step off that baseball field that he thought was his calling.... What do you need to step away from this week?

I too thought I had a different call than to be an MD. I had always planned on being a veterinarian. Once while trimming trees in our orchard my Dad said "What about being a doctor". I couldn't hear him at that time... my heart was set on caring for animals on the farm. Years later my faculty advisor, Emmitt Haynes, said "Have you ever thought about Medical School". But I was busy studying for exams, doing projects, keeping up with the day to day of school on that agricultural campus. But when I went home for Christmas that year, sitting quietly in my room doing devotions, I heard God speaking "You're going to be a doctor".... WHAT!! I knew then that I had to start exploring that possibility. I had to get away from the distractions of classes, exams, research papers to really hear that call.

I listened to the call to be a physician but it was not the last time that I heard God speak to me. That call was only the first step in a lifetime of serving that would take many iterations. Just when I would get comfortable, God would throw a new path in front of me. Sometimes those changes were a bit uncomfortable or scary. I needed to know that God was there with me.

When I was a senior student at ISU, I had several classes with Stephanie. While I didn't know her well, we occasionally ran into each other at the library and sat together to study. She, too, was applying to medical school. I didn't even know her last name.

On November 25, 1985, a small plane carrying the college cross country team crashed. Killed in that crash were two Iowa State coaches, a pilot, three cross country team members and a trainer. Several people asked if I knew anyone on the plane. Not knowing anyone on the cross country team I said that I didn't. The next day they published the victims' photos in the school newspaper and I saw Stephanie, the trainer, who I had studied with. I went to the memorial service held in Hilton Coliseum. At the beginning of the service they played a song that had become the team's theme song. It was a "one hit wonder" by Matthew Wilder, "Ain't Nothing Gonna Break My Stride".

Stephanie's eulogy was the personal statement she had written for her medical school application. In it she spoke about why she wanted to become a physician, how she wanted to help people, and how her faith played such an integral part in her life.

Several weeks later I had a dream. I was riding through campus on a bus and saw Stephanie on the sidewalk. I tried unsuccessfully to get the driver to stop the bus to let her get on. From the sidewalk I heard her say, "It's okay, you're going to do this for both of us". Every time medical school or life got tough, that song, that obscure "one hit wonder" would come on the radio and I sensed that I was not alone in

my journey. God would speak to me, through that angel Stephanie. The struggles didn't melt away but I felt Jesus present with me... we were on this journey together. How does God speak to you in those moments?

I've been reminded of my call to a caring ministry when I had to take unassigned ER call from St. Anns and a new patient came to my office as an ER follow up from hand injuries

The gentlemen showed up for his appointment, dirty, slightly disheveled. The room had a certain odor when I walked in. His hand was bandaged. I began to take his history and he told me that he had put his hand through a plate glass door to avoid hitting his girlfriend when he was drunk. He had several cuts and lots of suturing that had ~~to be~~ ^{been} done in the ER. He didn't bring any ER records with him and he couldn't remember if they gave him a tetanus shot or not. Knowing that I would need a little more information than what I would be able to get from him, I excused myself to go make a phone call to the ER to get records faxed over so that I would have all the information that I needed.

I called the hospital and I was transferred to the medical records desk and then on to another and another person in my relentless pursuit of getting the answers. All the while the patient was waiting in the exam room to be cared for. As I was sitting on hold....quietly.... it hit me.... It was God saying, "stop questioning how he got here, stop trying to fix this.... I sent him here.... to you.... so that you would Care for him. I went back to the exam room a little embarrassed that *I* was so distracted by the logistics that I had forgotten that I was there to care for the person, not just the wounds. I wounds had really already been taken care of by the ER. This man needed someone to stand beside him in his process of healing. I spoke with the patient, and scheduled a return visit as the hand had not healed enough to have the stitches removed. He returned a total of three visits and then I never saw him again. Who are you being called to walk beside in their moment of healing.

I've had to learn to step away... to be quiet... to listen and to have my eyes opened. I've diagnosed cancer, not because I'm a brilliant doctor but because in a quiet moment the Holy Spirit whispered to me to get a test that wasn't typically indicated.

I've made changes to my practice situation when I found that the current location was no longer the place that God was calling me to be even though the call to medicine was still very strong.

So what does all of this have to do with our scripture passage... and these weeks of Lent? Maybe you feel like you are in need of some type of healing... physical, emotional...spiritual...financial. On the surface the scripture passage is about healing.... opening the eyes of the blind man. And that message would be enough to talk about opening your eyes as you look to what you may not be seeing in God's call to you. But the thing that struck me about this particular passage on healing was the first part of verse 23... He took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village.

He had to remove the man from his distractions... his home, his family, maybe his occupation... and take him away where he could be healed. The blind man was comfortable in his home, where everything was familiar.

During Lent we remember the journey Jesus took as he made the ultimate sacrifice for us. We celebrate the healing that occurred on that Easter morning. Many people take a moment to step away from something.... To "give something up for Lent". Often we think of giving up something that affects our health, like chocolate, or ice cream. I've heard many people talk about going through closets or boxes in the

basement and giving up "one box a week". But maybe we are called to Give up something bigger. An old Grudge that is keeping you from healing a relationship. An outside activity that is no longer fulfilling but is preventing you from having the time to volunteer somewhere else that would feed your soul? An addiction that is harming you physically or financially.

What else might we be called to "give up for Lent"... What might God be calling you to step away from? How might that free you up to see another path that God is asking you to walk?

During Lent we often step away from an item, but maybe we need to step away from our day to day to listen to what God is saying and see with a new set of eyes what our vision is for the future. Take this time of Lent to be "outside of your village" and be ready to let the healing and the new vision begin. Any maybe, like the man in this passage, your initial "seeing " will not be clear. The image may be "fuzzy" and blurred. It may take time for the vision to come into focus. And maybe the "healing" isn't as much a "cure" as it is the healing touch of having others being present with you or you being present with them.... as Jesus was when he took this man by the hand and led him away. Jesus was truly present with him as the man was no longer in his "comfort zone" of the familiar places in his village... the places where despite his "blind eyes" he could function fairly well because everything is familiar and unchanged. But after healing Jesus sent him home, saying, "Don't even go into the village." "Healing doesn't always take you back to where you were but sometimes to a new place, a new normal."

So as you leave here today don't just go back through the "same village" that brought you here, but take time to look around you, to see the possibilities of what God is calling you to do and to be, to possibly see the new path that you are being led to walk.

Don't go back through the "old village" that may distract you, but take the time to go home first with this new vision. And don't let those, like the brother in law in Field of Dreams.... who can't see the new vision ... distract you from the new call on your life. God will be with you... Jesus will hold your hand and lead you and If you keep your eyes focused on the goal, "ain't nothing gonna break your stride".