



# SERMON OF THE WEEK

## First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu at Ko'olau

### September 2, 2018

### I No Can See (Hope Restored Series)

### Pastor Dan Chun

**O**ur series is called Hope Restored and we're walking through the Gospel of Mark. One of the best ways to have hope restored is to admit we are blind in many ways and need help. If we can confess, then Jesus helps us see.

Let's stand and listen to the recorded reading from *The Bible Experience* of the passage for today, the Gospel of Mark chapter 8: 22-26

*Mark 8:22 They came to Bethsaida, and some people brought a blind man and begged Jesus to touch him.*

*Mark 8:23 He took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village. When He had spit on the man's eyes and put his hands on him, Jesus asked, "Do you see anything?"*

*Mark 8:24 He looked up and said, "I see people; they look like trees walking around."*

*Mark 8:25 Once more Jesus put His hands on the man's eyes. Then his eyes were opened, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly.*

*Mark 8:26 Jesus sent him home, saying, "Don't even go into the village."*

It is interesting that only the Gospel of Mark has this story. As you might imagine, blindness was prevalent in the first century in the Middle East. There were no sunglasses to protect the eyes from the sun, resulting in ophthalmia, which is the severe inflammation of the

eye. Scholar William Barclay says historically it was not unusual to see people with stuff encrusted around their eyes, and flies would settle on them, thus spreading infection.

This blind man must be well loved because it says that the townspeople brought him to Jesus and asked Jesus to heal him. Notice how the community brought the man to Jesus. First question to us is do we have a passion to bring our friends to Jesus? We know of their needs. Do we try to bring them to Jesus? Notice the gentleness of Jesus as He tenderly cares for this blind man.

*Mark 8:23 He took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village....*

Similar to Chris' sermon two weeks ago on Mark chapter 7, Jesus very pastorally takes the blind man by the hand and leads him away from everyone. Jesus takes him way outside the village. Why? Many reasons. Like respecting a confidential HIPAA (Health Insurance Portability and Accountability) rule, Jesus wanted the blind man to have privacy.

But more importantly, if this man was blind for maybe a very long time, can you imagine if he was suddenly healed among a crowd in the town square? How traumatic it would be to suddenly see all these people in the town staring at you, and maybe cheering for you, and at the same time experiencing light and a kaleidoscope of colors? Jesus takes him outside. Jesus is always a gentleman. He is kind. He is courteous

and considerate of people – especially those who are disadvantaged. Also, according to Matthew chapter 11, Bethsaida is a pretty sinful town, so Jesus might be protecting him.

Then of course comes what we think would be the weird part.

*Mark 8:23 He took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village. When He had spit on the man's eyes and put his hands on him, Jesus asked, "Do you see anything?"*

Why is Jesus spitting on people? What is going on? Dan, I thought you just said that He was kind and considerate?

In the previous chapter, Chris preached on how Jesus was presented a deaf man who couldn't speak well. Jesus then put His fingers in his ears to show him that He would heal his deafness, and then He spat and touched the man's tongue as if to say, "I will heal your speech too."

Yech! Who wants Jesus spitting on them? Get this: God always uses different methods to reach different people. That is why we have different denominations. Did you know that denominations attract people according to which of the five senses is most dominant? Generally speaking. For example – Episcopalians and Catholics tend to be highly visual. They love carved statues, stained glass windows, and beautiful cathedrals, which are visual art pieces in and of themselves. The visual art is part of the worship.

**T**hose of Pentecostal/Charismatic denominations tend to be more kinesthetic, meaning they tend to be more touch or “feelings” oriented. An environment has to feel good, so they don’t care if the sanctuary looks like a barn, a warehouse, or a gym. Who cares! But in the worship service, do they feel the Spirit?

Presbyterians tend to lean towards listening, the aural sense. The preaching of the word is central. While charismatic denominations, like Vineyard, tend to have every meeting begin with singing and worship as they feel God’s presence, Presbyterians want to hear good, biblical, creative, intellectual preaching, and often for 30 minutes. Catholics, on the other hand, who are visual, tend to have short homilies, 10 to 15 minutes.

So when it comes to Jesus’ method of including spitting in the healing, know that God uses methods that 1<sup>st</sup> century people will understand. So don’t think 21<sup>st</sup>-century America in reading this. Think 30 AD. In ancient Palestine, people believed that spittle had healing power. To give us 21<sup>st</sup>-century people a little more understanding of this – isn’t it that when we cut or burn a finger, we often put it in our saliva-filled mouth to ease the pain?

The first-century blind man knew that spit was part of the healing process, so when Jesus used this method to heal him, he could understand it. Plus, by Jesus moistening the eyelids, it would begin to dissolve that crust I mentioned earlier that were often on eyelids and would enable the man to open his eyes and see. I don’t think we who pray for healing today would do that, unless you want us to!

So again, Jesus used different methods for different people to heal them. Often with words like “Take up your bed and walk,” or “Wake up, little girl, and rise,” but this time, no words; just spit. This is important for us who want to learn how to pray for healing for people. Healing prayer is not a

formula. It’s not hitting the buttons on a cash register or an ATM. Every person needs a different kind of prayer.

I once was taught that when we pray for people, first be quiet and ask God which of the five senses to pray and emphasize that would help this particular person. For example, do I say:

1. “Lord, may this person FEEL the warmth of Your love and please fill him up.” “Lord, may this person SEE You as the light in her darkness, and visualize the beauty of Your face and promise.”
2. “Lord, may she have the aroma of Christ and SMELL the sweetness of Your love.”
3. “Lord, may this dear brother HEAR Your words of kindness, truth, and promise. Block out the lies he has heard and hear instead, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant.’”
4. Or, “Lord, may this sister TASTE the refreshing waters of Your forgiveness and freedom.”

When people share a prayer request with you, listen to which of the five senses is dominant for them. Do they say they feel bad? Do things look bad? Does God’s voice seem dull to them? Answering those questions will give you a clue, and so pray in that way.

So Jesus spits on the blind man’s eyes, lays hands on him, and asks, “Do you see anything?” The man says, “I can’t quite see clearly. I see like trees walking.” So Jesus prays a second time, and lays hands on his eyes, and then the man could see completely and clearly!

Many of you might find this amazing that Jesus the Messiah, the Christ, had to pray twice for someone. That’s the only time in the gospels. This means many things. If Jesus needs to pray for some people more than once, then so do us humans. No shame in that.

Second, it doesn’t mean that Jesus doesn’t have the power to heal the first time. Again, the tender side of Jesus is

that He goes as fast as He thinks the healing should. It was in stages, as I said, so there wouldn’t be a sudden explosion of colors for this blind man.

Here is why I really like this story. I don’t want us to miss this great truth. The blind man got healed because his community brought him to Jesus. If we have friends who need healing, bring them to Jesus and pray for them to actually get healed. He would not have been healed if he didn’t have friends who had the faith that Jesus could actually heal him.

Another reason I like this story is that the blind man got fully healed only after he was willing to say, “I still can’t see right. I’m seeing trees walking.” That statement is an amazing thing to say. Why? Because the blindness in our lives does not leave unless we can admit we are blind, that we can’t see, and that we need Jesus to heal us.

This leads to what I want to talk about next – OUR spiritual blindness. Just as we all have mental health issues, hence, the Mental Health Conference this weekend here at First Prez with Kay Warren as the featured speaker.

We are all in some way spiritually blind. Sorry, but it’s true. Everyone has sin and a blind spot they don’t know. It could be something as simple as we talk too much, eat too much, rudely don’t listen, are more selfish and narcissistic than we think. Sometimes we say about others, “I wish someone would tell her or him about that issue! It’s such a blind spot!”

But here’s the scary thing: WE ALL have blind spots, and there are people probably talking about us(!) behind our backs(!) saying, “Boy, I wish someone would tell them about their issue! It is so glaring but they don’t even know it.”

Spiritually, do we know we have faults, sins, and spiritual blindness? If the blind man in the Scripture passage didn’t say, “I still don’t see good,” Jesus wouldn’t have touched his eyes again.

**B**ut the man humbly admitted what he needed to improve his life.

Unless we confess a holy dissatisfaction about ourselves, then we are not going to grow and be fully healed. You will only be a partially-sighted-partially-seeing-trees-walking person if you don't confess your faults. We don't want to be just tree-walking-seeing people. The blind man got more healed and received a crystal clear vision of life when he could confess that he still had blindness in his life.

A main contributing factor of our spiritual blindness is that we just don't have the KNOWLEDGE of who God is and how He acts. The best way to know God and understand Him is to read the Bible. That is why our church is promoting the *Just Show Up* strategy, which is basically having people just show up, with no homework prior to the gathering, to listen to a dramatic reading of Scripture for about 40 minutes once a week. Most people including Christians have never read the entire Bible. They want to read the Bible more but don't have a plan.

My friend Bill Hwang created an international movement of groups of people listening to Scripture together. There are now more than 4,000 small groups of people meeting in homes, businesses, churches, and schools to listen to Scripture.

Bill has worked with Fuller Seminary to design a schedule so that every week when you meet there is a structured plan to read with other people the entire Bible by reading a Psalm or Proverbs, and then a reading from the Old Testament and the new Testament. It is so simple but effective, and something I want to permeate our church so that we will have all read the full Bible in community. Here's Bill being interviewed by Todd Boslinger of Fuller Seminary to explain how *Just Show Up* works. (Video of Bill Hwang interview was shown.)

Why is reading the Bible in community so important? We know that when we

exercise or diet it is easier to do it with someone. Same for Scripture reading and listening. Do it with others and it becomes easier and more accessible. Again, the theme of this passage is that it was the community that brought the blind man to Jesus.

Sometimes when we are busy we don't have time to do the homework. But for this, no homework. Just show up and you can listen along while you read your Bible.

Bill started it in his New York Wall Street Manhattan office and in his church and in a neighboring college. I have done it in his office and in his church. I am amazed how the Scripture comes alive by just concentrating and immersing yourself in a Bible reading for a prolonged time. So many new things were revealed to me as if God was talking to me. It helped me, encouraged me, and informed me. I felt the presence of the Holy Spirit in a new way.

Here's a short video showing the impact of people who "just showed up" reading Scripture together in New York City. It's interesting how even non-Christians have dropped by to just read and hear this Bible they know little about. Let's take a look. (Video was shown.)

To get our church acquainted with Scripture listening, we have been offering *Just Show Up* gatherings in WAKO and on Sunday morning in worship and in Life Training Classes. For the last few months we have been playing two different dramatic Bible reading programs. One is called *Word of Promise* that features a cast including Jim Caviezel as Jesus, and other stars like Jon Voight, Marisa Tomei, Lou Gossett Jr., Gary Sinise, and Michael York. It uses the New King James Version.

And then there is The Bible Experience, which has an all-black cast with readers like Denzel Washington, Samuel L. Jackson, Blair Underwood as Jesus, Forest Whitaker, Cuba Gooding Jr., Angela Bassett, and many others. This is

the one that uses the Today's New International Version. Both recordings are very dramatic and have sound effects, orchestral music as you heard today in our Bible reading.

*Just Show Up* is a call to return to the biblical way of learning. As 1 Timothy 4:13 says, yes, have preaching, and yes, have teaching, but you must also have the public reading of Scripture, which is the regular extended listening and reading together of Scripture in community.

Here's a short animated video that shows why the public reading of Scripture has been a lost art. It made a major difference in ancient Israel, is commanded in the New Testament, and how it can bless us today. This is the BIBLICAL basis for community Bible reading. (Video from [thebibleproject.org](http://thebibleproject.org) was shown.)

It is my dream that our church gets fully anchored in Scripture. It is my dream that all of our members might have listened to and read the entire Bible. Our community will be so spiritually fit and less spiritually blind if we can be guided by Scripture and empowered by the Holy Spirit. May we be a church that is always of the Word AND the Spirit, but we have got to know the Word.

If we don't know what the Scripture says then we—children, youth, and adults—will ALWAYS take on the culture and thinking of society, instead of God's Word. We won't know God's will and wisdom. We will make decisions based on not what God wants but on what WE want or what the world wants.

The reading of Scripture in community has to be a core value of our church. Eventually I want all the small groups, fellowship groups, home groups, individuals, and even members in their workplaces to start reading the Bible together in some form. It will enhance our church, our lives, and our city.

It will center us, and make us wiser for our family, recreation, and work.

I know that when I have done these reading groups, I am amazed at how much more is revealed to me that I had never seen before.

Last week I mentioned Lowell Berry, a successful man who used his money for God. Bill Hwang is another who will use his money for the Kingdom and plans to pay for more dramatic Bible readings with famous or indigenous actors in Japanese, Mandarin, and Spanish. He just finished a Korean version, so that the word of God might fill the lives of the people of God everywhere.

I am hoping in the fall, we can start having more *Just Show Up* groups. And if you want to start one in your home group or fellowship group, small group or in your business, or in your school, we have starter kits for you. Executive Coordinator Jenny Sung and Deacon Vice-Moderator Michele Gorman can help you get started. They will be in the Fellowship Hall. Look for the *Just Show Up* table to sign up for the training session on how to organize and lead one in your neighborhood, small group, or workplace. Very soon we hope to have *Just Show Up* opportunities here at First Prez every Sunday at 8 AM and 9:30 AM. So go to the *Just Show Up* table to learn more about it.

Three things create our spiritual blindness that Jesus can heal. First, a LACK OF HUMILITY that says, "I am blind, and I need help." Second, a lack of knowledge. We need to read the Bible. And third, a lack of experience of God.

As I said before we need to be guided by Scripture and empowered by the Holy Spirit. We need to experience that empowerment. For the blind man in our passage, he got to experience healing. Experiencing God through worship, prayer, healing, and reading the Bible is crucial, because it is in experiencing God we are freed of blindness. In our Scripture

passage, the blind man did not really see until he experienced Jesus.

My friend Guy plays ice hockey. During games he loved hitting people really hard on the ice and felt good about it. Hockey players body block and knock people down or smash them into a wall. He liked skating into people and smashing them. Until He saw the Clint Eastwood movie *Million Dollar Baby*, and it changed his life. It's the story of a boxer who died after getting hit in the head too hard – too many times.

In the movie he witnessed and experienced the horror of the trauma and tragedy being hit too hard. From then on during a hockey game, he wouldn't block or hit people as hard as he could.

We can have all the statistics about concussions and CTE (Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy), but many will not change until they witness or experience in a deep visceral way the effects of these concussions.

In a moment we are about to experience the holy sacrament of Communion. It brings it all together. It can be a step to remove spiritual blindness. First of all, in this sacrament something spiritual happens. We believe that during this time, Jesus is somehow more present than other times. We will experience Him. Put out your spiritual senses and see, feel, hear, and taste, if that is true especially when we have the time of waiting and holding the elements as we wait for everyone to receive the cup and bread.

Communion is also KNOWLEDGE, as we always talk about how the Lord died on a cross for our sake. Communion is not saying that Jesus is just a man who was just a bit better than Mother Teresa or Nelson Mandela or He that He is just like Buddha or Mohammed or the Dalai Lama. No, He is the only one who died not only for the sins of others but for the sins you committed. Unlike others who walked this earth, He was fully God and

fully man. No one else has claimed that. He saved you. He sacrificed His life for you.