

Sunday January 19, 2025

First Lesson: Mark 8:22–26

GOSPEL READING: John 2: 1–11

Sermon Series: Revitalize: Belief

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- We are continuing with our sermon series "Revitalize," this week, where this week **we are focusing on revitalizing our belief.**
- Belief is challenging, especially when life feels like a series of one thing after another—two steps forward, only to be pushed four steps back.
- This human condition can make it feel like progress is futile, whether in personal situations or broader social issues. It's hard to believe when the path forward is clouded by obstacles that seem insurmountable.
- The one idea I am working through is **this idea that belief is not always instantaneous.**
- Sometimes, it takes time to form, grow, and transform, much like the journey we see in Mark 8:22–26, where

Jesus heals a blind man at Bethsaida, or in John 2:1–11, where Jesus turns water into wine at Cana.

- Both stories show us that belief often comes in stages—through trust, through incremental understanding, and through those unexpected moments when we experience the fullness of God’s love.
- **And yet, let’s be honest—belief can be hard, can’t it?**
- Life doesn’t always cooperate.
- Sometimes, it can feel like we aren’t making any headway at all!
- The human condition is filled with moments that challenge our faith: personal setbacks, relational strains, and the overwhelming feeling of trying to push against a tide of injustices that never seems to relent.
- Take, for example, the affordable housing crisis we’re working on with Justice in Action.
- It feels so big, so daunting, as if the progress we make is just a drop in the ocean.

- We've partnered with the Mediation Center here in Lincoln to explore solutions, and this past week, our steering committee was on a Zoom call with a mediation center in St. Louis, where they're wrestling with the same issue.
- They shared stories of small victories and hard-fought battles, and their words reminded me of how vital it is to keep pressing forward, even when the road feels impossibly long.
- **That's why belief matters so much—it's what sustains us in these moments.**
- It's what keeps us coming back to the table, keeps us hopeful that change is possible, that justice can prevail, and that God's love is still at work in us and in the world.
- You see Church family, the stories we'll reflect on today are not just about healing and miracles; they're about what happens when belief is reignited, when we choose to trust again, and when we see God moving even in the smallest increments of progress.

- So, as we dive into today's message, **I invite you to ask yourself: where in your life, your relationships, or your work for justice do you need belief to be revitalized?**
- Where might God be inviting you to trust in the process, to hold on through the setbacks, and to see the miracles unfolding—even if they start small?
- Today, let us open our hearts to the God who is always working to restore our sight and turn the ordinary into something extraordinary.
- **Therefore, revisiting Mark 8:22–26 from the lens of revitalizing our belief, there are some themes of belief that I believe can be helpful for us to take note of both individually and collectively;**
- The main theme of belief for me surfaces in the fact that the healing of this man requires healing in stages.
- I have noted for the third week of this sermon series that this is the only story in the Bible where Jesus' healing did not seemingly take the first time.

- The healing of the blind man at Bethsaida is unique because it unfolds in two stages.
- Jesus first spits on the man's eyes and lays hands on him.
- When asked what he can see, the man responds, "*I see people; they look like trees walking around*" (v. 24). Jesus then lays his hands on the man's eyes again, and his sight is fully restored.
- This gradual process invites us to reflect on the incremental nature of belief and understanding.

### **First looking at the biblical Exegesis and Historical Context of our story;**

- **Bethsaida** was a fishing village on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee. The name means "house of the fisherman," but it was also known for its lack of faith, as Jesus later rebukes it (Matthew 11:21).
- The two-stage healing mirrors the disciples' incomplete understanding of Jesus.

- Earlier in Mark 8, they fail to grasp the significance of the feeding miracles. The blind man's journey from partial to complete sight symbolizes the disciples' journey toward full spiritual insight.

**There are some medical considerations to be observed as well in this sort.**

- The blind man may have had a condition such as cataracts or corneal scarring, which could blur vision and make people appear as indistinct shapes, like “trees walking around.”
- The incremental nature of his healing reflects Jesus' compassionate approach, attending not only to physical sight but also to the man's gradual faith journey.
- **This possible revelation addresses a classmate's question from our Wednesday Night Applying the Sermon to Life Class that occurs at 5:45p who asked;**
- “How did the man know what trees look like?”

- This question suggests that the man may not have been born blind but lost his sight later in life.
- This also aligns with the text's focus on restoration—Jesus restores not just the man's vision but his entire understanding of the world, including his belief in divine power.
- Either way for me, the healing of the blind man at Bethsaida in Mark 8:22–26 offers a profound metaphor for how our faith can be revitalized.
- This gradual process invites us to consider that faith, like the blind man's healing, often unfolds in stages.
- It's not always a moment of immediate clarity but a journey of growth and transformation.
- This idea resonates deeply with the Wesleyan understanding of sanctification—the process of being made holy and growing in God's grace.
- John Wesley taught that salvation is not a one-time event but a dynamic and ongoing journey, in which

justification marks the beginning of our faith, where we come to know God's grace.

- **Sanctification, however, is the lifelong process of growing deeper in that grace, where the more we know God, the more we begin to trust God.**
- **In other words faith, like sight, develops over time.**
- There are moments when our understanding is incomplete, when the obstacles in front of us feel insurmountable, and when life's challenges cloud our view of God's presence.
- Yet, as we continue to walk with God, experiencing God's love and faithfulness in new ways, our faith is revitalized.
- This process mirrors the blind man's healing: the initial steps may not give us the full picture, but as we trust God to continue the work, our vision becomes clearer, and our faith stronger.



- A simpler way to name this is to suggest that **the more we know God, the more we trust God—This isn't just an intellectual knowing; it's relational.**
- It's the kind of knowing that comes from experience—walking through life's valleys and mountaintops, seeing God's faithfulness in the small and large moments.
- Like the blind man, our journey may involve moments of partial clarity where we're unsure of what lies ahead.
- Yet, with each step, God invites us to trust, to allow divine grace to transform our vision and expand our faith.
- This process of sanctification is a hopeful reminder that it's okay if our faith doesn't feel fully formed or if our belief wavers.
- Just as Jesus didn't leave the blind man with partial sight, God doesn't leave us where we are.
- God's work in us is ongoing, and with each step, we are being renewed, strengthened, and revitalized.

- Faith, like healing, is not just about the destination but about the transformative process that draws us closer to God and equips us to live out God's love in the world.
- **Similarly, the connection between the healing of the blind man in Mark 8:22–26 and the miracle at Cana in John 2:1–11 reinforces the idea that the more we know God, the more we trust God.**
- In John 2:1–11, the transformation of water into wine is Jesus' first recorded miracle and a powerful example of how God's work often begins with trust.
- At first, the situation at the wedding appears dire—the wine has run out, and the hosts face potential embarrassment.
- Giving some Historical information on what is occurring at the scene of our story;
  - **The Jars:** The six stone water jars used for Jewish purification rites each held 20–30 gallons. Their size signifies the abundance of the miracle, while their ritual use underscores Jesus' role in fulfilling and surpassing Jewish traditions.

- **Symbolism:** Water represents the old order of purification under the Law, while wine symbolizes the new covenant in Jesus. This transition mirrors the revitalization of belief from adherence to ritual to embracing grace.
- **The Wedding:** Weddings were significant communal events in Jewish culture, symbolizing covenantal joy. Running out of wine would have brought shame to the host, making Jesus' miracle not just an act of kindness but a restoration of honor and celebration.
- **In our sermon application to life class, we questioned some of the logic behind the ritual involving the jars in John 2:1–11.**
- Why did Jesus choose to use jars meant for purification rituals? Why instruct the servants to fill them with water when there was a need for wine?
- On the surface, the process might seem unnecessary or even illogical, yet these details are significant.

- The use of the purification jars and the step-by-step nature of the instructions **emphasize that revitalizing our belief often involves engaging in practices or rituals that don't always make immediate sense to us.**
- As a church, may I suggest that we embody this same spirit of faithfulness when we pour our heart and soul into planning activities that reflect God's love.
- Think about how the United Women in Faith diligently plan Mission Christmas, knowing that their efforts may touch lives in ways they'll never fully see.
- Or consider how we just hosted our first Stories and Carols event as an outreach for children and families.
- We couldn't predict exactly how the event would impact those who attended, but we trusted that these small, intentional acts of ministry would plant seeds of connection, joy, and belief.
- These efforts, much like the filling of the purification jars, **require faith in the incremental process.**

- **We don't always know the full outcome or understand how each step fits into God's larger plan, but we trust that through these actions, something transformative is happening.**
- Just as Jesus used the jars to reveal God's abundant grace, our ministry and outreach become vessels for God's work in the lives of those we serve. **It reminds us that revitalizing belief—whether in our own hearts or in the broader community—is often a slow and steady process, one that unfolds as we faithfully engage in practices of love, service, and hope.**
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- These jars, once used for ritual cleansing, **become vessels for a miraculous transformation, symbolizing how God works through ordinary means to accomplish extraordinary things.**
- This incremental process mirrors our journey of faith. Just as the servants filled the jars one step at a time, often without fully understanding the outcome, we are

invited to take steps of trust even when the path ahead is unclear.

- Through these acts of obedience and participation, our faith is shaped and deepened.
- Ultimately, the ritual involving the jars serves as a reminder that revitalizing belief isn't about instant results— but about trusting in God's ongoing work, even when we don't have the full picture.
- It's in these seemingly small and deliberate steps of faith that transformation happens, allowing us to experience the fullness of God's grace and grow in our trust.
- **As we bring these reflections together, we arrive at the million-dollar question: How can we be assured that we are intentionally revitalizing our belief, both individually and collectively as a community of faith?**
- To answer, we can look to the examples of Mary and the servants in the story of the wedding at Cana.

- Mary, Jesus' mother, demonstrates profound relational trust.
- Even when Jesus initially seems hesitant, she confidently tells the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." Her faith isn't rooted in intellectual certainty but in her deep, personal knowledge of who Jesus is. She trusts his timing, his purpose, and his power.
- The servants, whom our Wednesday Night Class identified as the main witnesses of this truth, also show us the importance of obedience and trust.
- They follow Jesus' instructions step by step, likely without understanding what he is doing or why.
- Yet their simple acts of faith lead to an extraordinary transformation. The water becomes wine—**not just any wine, but the best wine, symbolizing the overflowing goodness of God's grace.**
- Then, taking a glimpse of the blind man once more in Mark 8 who experienced partial clarity before full healing, and placing him in context with the servants, Mary, and others at the wedding—lo and behold, we catch a

glimpse of Jesus' true nature through this gradual miracle.

- You and I, from our conversation this morning, will hopefully experience an invitation to deepen our own faith **from this reminder that belief often grows in stages as we experience God's transformative work in our lives.**
- **These stories Church family teaches us that faith is not static.**
- It develops as we encounter God's presence—through moments of healing, provision, and the quiet assurance that God is with us.
- For us today, the same truths apply.
- Revitalizing our belief happens as we take small, faithful steps, trusting God even when we don't fully understand the outcome.
- **Each act of obedience, each moment of trust, builds upon the last, drawing us closer to God.**



- And just as Jesus didn't leave the blind man with partial sight or the wedding guests with empty jars, **God doesn't leave us where we are.... Hallelujah!**
- God's work in us is ongoing, renewing, strengthening, and revitalizing our faith so that we are equipped to live out God's love in the world.
- So, how do we intentionally revitalize our beliefs?
- **We embrace** the journey of sanctification, trusting in God's ongoing work.
- **We listen** to Jesus' invitation, like Mary and the servants, and respond with obedience and trust.
- **We participate** in the life of the church, pouring our heart and soul into efforts like recently Mission Christmas, Stories and Carols, or the countless other ways we embody God's love.
- **And we trust that through these incremental acts of faith, God is transforming us and our community.**
- The challenge and invitation for each of us is to trust in the transformative process of God's grace.

- Whether we are in a moment of clarity or uncertainty, whether our jars feel empty or full, **God is working.**
- **God is working** through our personal lives;
- **God is working** in our families;
- **God is working** in our employment situations;
- **God is working** in our communities;
- **Step by step, act by act, we are being drawn closer to the fullness of God's grace,** with the understanding that God is working in us, through us, around us, equipping those obedient to this work to share that learned discovery of grace with a world who desperately relieved from seeing only trees!
- Amen.