

Blinded by Bad Visions

Lesson: 1 Peter 1:22-25, Luke 24:13-31

Why didn't these two travelers on the road recognize Jesus? Jesus had already appeared to some people around Jerusalem, and they tell us they had heard about it. The other people Jesus appeared to were surprised at first, but they knew who he was pretty quickly. These men walked with him, looked in his eyes, listened to him explain scripture and still did not know. They weren't blind. They just couldn't see Jesus, ...because they were looking for someone else.

“We were hoping that he was the one to redeem Israel?”

They were hoping for someone to rescue them from their troubles, or save them from their enemies, or a real leader who would turn the bad times into good times, a real king who would make Israel the nation it once was in the glory days of King David.

That's what we look for, isn't it? We want someone to rescue us from our troubles. We want some one to play savior and protect us against our enemies. We are always looking for a real leader who will turn the bad times into good times for us. We want a real King (or a great President) who will restore our nation to the glory it once had - whenever we think that was.

Those travelers that day had great dreams - clear visions - of what it would be like, and Jesus would give them their dreams. Their visions were so strong that even listening to Jesus explain his mission all over again that day walking down the road, they could not see past their past. Their visions got in the way of seeing who he really was, what he really came to do, the different Israel he saw they all could be. He had told them they had to lose themselves to gain the world. They had to give up their visions, and learn to see with his vision. They weren't blind. They were just blinded by bad visions.

How often does what we want to see get in the way of what we see? How often have you missed a beautiful view because you were not paying attention? ...or something your parent said because you were texting? How often have you missed something your child or your spouse was saying because you were busy with something important.

How often have you missed some amazing talent or desire deep in your child's hopes because you were already too focused on your dream for them! How often have you missed some truth about how the way things really are because you could only see things the way you think they ought to be - at home, in politics, or at church.

How often have we missed some new vision for who we are and how we serve in the days to come at Northwood because we still see Northwood as the same it has always been - because we blind ourselves to the differences today from 30 years ago, 20 years ago, 10 years ago.

In 2003, I was working at another Presbyterian Church downtown as an Associate for Congregational Care. My car was finally dying. I needed to buy a good car, which by Meriwether definition means it should last more than 200,000 miles. I bought a Camry from the Cavender.

About a month later I was playing golf with Charlie Orsinger, a genuinely kind man who loves to laugh and was a fierce competitor even as an advanced senior player. I liked to tease Charlie, so I told him about buying the Camry from Cavender. “Why didn’t you buy American?,” he asked. “You need to buy an American made car.” “I did, Charlie. I bought a car 80% made in Tennessee, not one of your Buicks made in Canada and Mexico.” Charlie wasn’t blind. He could see a golf ball as far as he could hit it. But he had an old vision of how you define an “American company,” and he couldn’t see that his Buicks were mostly foreign made. He was blinded by a bad vision.

Those two fellows on the Emmaus Road missed Jesus on the road because they had only seen him through the eyes of their bad visions. They had no reason to expect the unexpected - when the unexpected was someone raised from the dead. They needed something to break through the expected in a way that they could recognize the unexpected.

“He took bread, blessed it and broke it, and gave it to them. And they recognized him.” They had been paying attention when he broke bread. He told them to remember, and they did. They did not understand how he got there, and he did not stay long enough to tell them. But they knew that their old vision had been bad, and he was with them now. That’s all they needed now! They were excited and had to share what they had seen when he opened their eyes.

Working as an interim in different towns and even a different state for seven years, I was overjoyed to be back home last July. San Antonio has changed a good bit in seven years, but it looks enough the same that I still expect the old San Antonio instead of the different one. I know the old way to get to places by landmarks and store signs. (Any old-timer in San Antonio knows street signs are pretty useless.) But they finally widened the Loop while I was away, and the exits changed. I’ve been home almost a year, and I’m still missing some exits. We get programmed to the routine, and we are not thinking about what we are doing because we are depending on the expected. In a way, I can see well enough, but I’m blinded by bad visions - because I’m not paying close enough attention!

Church is like driving a car in some ways. We build church on routine and regularity. We program people to expect the same. We don’t want to upset the routine. ...or to be more accurate, we don’t want to upset people by changing the routine. For example, instead of saying we are changing the start of worship from 11:00 to 10:55, we say that we will do announcements at 10:55 and start worship as usual at 11:00. It’s a new way of doing things that fits our old vision.

Routine in worship is not all bad. The “order” stays about the same. You don’t have to be lost by a strange new road map that is different every week in the bulletin. The same outline in worship frees the spiritual eyes to “wander” and pay attention to the scenery in your soul.

But being on “autopilot” can mean that we miss something - do not see something, do not hear something. We ignore a lot of what is going on, because we are only half paying attention. We are expecting the expected.

Those followers didn’t think they needed to prepare a table for Jesus when they reached their house and invited him in for supper. But he knew how to break through the blindness of their bad vision. He knew there was a place they had paid attention, a place where their focus would cause them to remember like he had told them to remember, where their bad visions would be swept aside by the vision of who he was in their presence that night. Then they would see that he was with them - and would always be with them.

Have we have gone to sleep spiritually at the wheel? Our spiritual eyes have become blinded to see only the expected. Do you tune yourself to ask what Christ may help you see about yourself or the world before you walk into this space?

Where around this table in worship does Jesus put a vision in front of you that gets you past all the bad visions you have of what you want from life, or how you think the world ought to be, or helps you see some problem in a way that is different from how you have been stuck seeing it up to now? Where does Christ open our eyes to see what we can be and do for his purposes in this moment in Northwood’s life? What can he do to help us ask open questions without jumping to old answers? What can he do to help us get past the visions we have to look with the vision he has? Isn’t that what we want? His vision for this church? His future for the place? His mission for our ministry?

The followers at that table were filled with joy and ran the seven miles in the dark back to Jerusalem to tell who they had seen. But it was not because Jesus has laid out a new road map for them. ...Not because he had given them a picture of the future. ...Not even because he had shown them that their old visions had been bad and kept them from seeing him as he was. They just knew they had seen him, and they went running to tell *who* they had seen.

Seeing him was all they needed! He was not the same in his resurrected embodiment as he had been in his old body. But he was enough the same that they could trust that the future could be very different. They saw him when their focus was changed to see him as he was, not as they expected.

This is the 3rd Sunday in Resurrection, and he is appearing all over everywhere. You are living in an unending season called Resurrection. Every Sunday is Resurrection Sunday, and Jesus appears to you every week in the breaking of bread and explaining the word and listening in prayer. You will recognize him when you are paying attention. He is not trying to hide from you or make it hard for you.

He will lead this congregation because you are his body in this part of his world - when you are attentive and looking for where he leads, when you are not blinded by your expectations that he will always lead you in the same direction, when you are listening closely to hear his different

seeing of the world today, and the different way his resurrection changes the way you can see the world around you.

He is at table in this room, and he is with you on this road between Jerusalem and Emmaus. In this day of worship and perspective between one week and another, he will give you true vision to replace all your bad visions. He is here to shape next week with his visions and to give you enough faith in his presence that you will be attentive and open to the places he will lead you and the things he will put in front of you this week. He will always come to you in ways you can recognize when you are looking for him.

Yes, they were blinded by their bad visions. But more importantly, they were hoping he would be their savior. I doubt Jesus will save you the way you think he will. He will save you by giving you his vision to replace your bad visions. He will save you when you are looking for him more than looking for the saving.