



Mark 6:1-6

What Do You See?

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What do you see when you look at Jesus?

In the Gospel of Mark, the first thing that happens during Jesus' ministry is that He calls four fishermen—two pairs of brothers—Simon and Andrew—James and John. These four left their nets (and boats and families) to follow Jesus (1:16-20). One suspects that they looked at Jesus and saw the Lord.

Then Jesus encountered a man with an unclean spirit and drove the spirit away. The people said, "What is this? A new teaching? For with authority He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey Him!" (1:27). One suspects that the unclean spirit looked at Jesus and saw the Lord.

And then Jesus healed a leper. People heard about it and came to Him from everywhere—so much so that Jesus could no longer travel freely because of the crush of people. One suspects that the crowds looked at Jesus and saw the Lord.

And then Jesus healed a paralytic, and people "were all amazed, and glorified God, saying, 'We never saw anything like this!'" (Mark 2:12). One suspects that the people looked at Jesus and saw the Lord.

And so it went—until Jesus came to His hometown. Jesus had been raised in Nazareth, a small town of perhaps five hundred people, maybe a thousand. In any event, it was a pretty small town, the kind of place where everyone knows everyone else...and everyone else's business. It was the kind of place where there is only one butcher and one baker and one candlestick maker.

When Jesus came to His hometown, He did not come alone. His disciples came with Him and if

a man was a Teacher and had disciples, then the man would be seen as a Rabbi. We would think that they would have welcomed Jesus with open arms. He's a hometown celebrity! He has been doing marvelous things! You'd think word would have reached them. Everyone else seemed to know. You'd think they would have a parade for Jesus or ask Him to give them a miraculous sign.

But when Jesus came with His disciples in tow, the people didn't welcome Him like that. They did invite Him to teach in the synagogue which, was an honor to be sure, but not a great honor since someone in that little town taught in the synagogue every week, and they passed the chore among the men. Anyone with something to say could usually say it.

But when Jesus began to teach in the synagogue, He surprised them. Nobody took a nap that day! Jesus started strong and got stronger. Pretty soon, the people were hanging onto the edge of their seats, unsure just where Jesus was going next, but certain that it would be an exciting ride. "Wow!" they said, "Where did this man get these things? What's this wisdom that's given to him? (6:2) What are these remarkable miracles he is performing? It sounds as if they looked at Jesus and saw the Lord.

But then they said, "Isn't this the carpenter? Isn't this Mary's boy? Isn't this the brother of James, Joseph, Judas, and Simon? Aren't his sisters here with us?" And they took offense at Him. (6:3)

Took offense?!

Where other people looked at Jesus and saw the Lord, these people looked at Jesus and saw the kid who grew up down the block—Mary's son. They knew His father and His mother, His brothers and His sisters. It was a pretty ordinary family. So, who did Jesus think He was, anyway, sitting in the teacher's seat as if He owned it, His voice sounding like the voice of God? Jesus had been gone from Nazareth for a while, and now He had come back full of Himself, putting on airs.

These hometown people might have been interested in Jesus' opinion about building a house or shaping an ox yoke. They knew that Joseph had taught Jesus carpentry. But now Jesus, this young man, sounded as if He possessed the wisdom of the ages, and they didn't like it.

Who did Jesus think He was, anyway?! They looked at Jesus, and they didn't see the Lord. They saw only a young man grown too big for his britches.

What do YOU see when you look at Jesus? The easy answers are Lord—Messiah—Son of God—Savior. Those are the kinds of words that we have used to describe Jesus for two thousand years, so they come readily to mind. But I sometimes wonder if we really believe these things about Jesus. Lord. Messiah. Son of God. Savior.

We live in a culture that is no respecter of persons. Perhaps it would be better to say that we live in a culture that respects no one. We say, “Well, he puts his pants on one leg at a time just like everyone else!” which is just another way of saying that he is no better than we are.

We’re apt to give Jesus credit for being wiser than most, perhaps wiser than anyone, but Lord, Messiah, Son of God, Savior? The titles roll easily off our lips during liturgy or as we sing, but do we really believe them?

Do we really believe that Jesus was one of a kind, God-come-into-our-midst, the one who makes it possible for us to have life eternal?

Do we really believe that Jesus not only opens heaven to us but also gives us wisdom for our day-by-day lives as we live them?

Do we really believe, when Jesus tells us to love our enemies, that He has the faintest clue? Surely that must just be a bit of hyperbole, you know, overstatement for effect! Surely Jesus doesn’t really expect us to love our enemies!

Maybe Jesus *was* a bit overstated and exaggerated. Maybe He *was* too big for His britches!

What we see depends on what we choose to see.

When the people of Nazareth looked at Jesus, they chose not to see very much.

What do we choose to see?

Martin Marty, who is a Lutheran pastor and teacher of pastors, once wrote about visiting a Benedictine abbey in Richardton, North Dakota. He was responding to a *New Yorker* article that concluded with the words, “Dakotans are losers,” and Marty knew otherwise.

Some Christians in North Dakota had decided to establish a Jewish-Christian dialogue, so they asked Marty to bring them a Jewish theologian. Marty invited his friend, Rabbi Samuel Sandmel. They flew together to Bismarck and then drove to the abbey at Richardton. The

further they went, the more nervous Rabbi Sandmel became. He was accustomed to cities, not prairies.

I can understand the rabbi's nervousness. A city dweller knows that he or she is safe in a crowd. To be alone is dangerous. Muggers work in lonely places. Driving through the Great Plains can be scary, because you are so alone. What happens if the car breaks down? Will anyone ever find us? Are there coyotes (pronounced kai-OH-tees)? Do the coyotes eat people?

I looked up Richardton on the map. It's halfway between Bismarck and Montana. The abbey is a cluster of lovely old buildings in the middle of nowhere. Around the abbey, fields stretch as far as the eye can see. If you ever want to get away from it all, that North Dakota abbey would be a great place to do it.

But, if you go, be prepared. There isn't much to do there at the end of the day. After dinner, Marty suggested to the rabbi that they sit on the patio. The rabbi looked at him skeptically, as if Marty had invited him to walk through the cornfields. Marty reminded the rabbi that they had watched seascapes happily enough, and there isn't much to see there either.

So they went to the patio and sat down to share some wine. They noticed a couple of lights in the distance and some cattle feeding on prairie grass. But then the rabbi noticed the scene changing moment-by-moment as the sun began to set. "Now it's orange-turning-to-gray-to-black," the rabbi exclaimed. "Think of what Monet would have done with this sight!"

Later, as they traveled back to Chicago, the rabbi didn't seem nervous anymore. A week later, the rabbi's wife called Rev. Marty. "Martin," she asked, "what did you do to Sam? He wants us to spend our next vacation in North Dakota!"

Where one person sees only a boring prairie, another sees a landscape worthy of Monet. What we see depends not only on our eyes, but also on our hearts and our minds.

It wasn't until the rabbi took a chair on the patio and gave the prairie his full attention that his eyes—and his heart and mind—were opened to see its beauty.

This is significant. In our busy lives, we are inclined to give Jesus so little time and attention. We glance through the window at Him, and then turn back to our everyday routine. And then we wonder why Jesus doesn't make more of a difference in our lives. Why isn't He more help? We wonder why the routine of our lives is so...routine.

I'm blessed to have known people took time to sit down with Jesus, to give Him their full attention, to really see Him. They take time to see the Lord.

Can we be honest in church? I hope so. We are distracted by cell phones, and television, and video games, and computers, and tablets, and a thousand other things. Our busy, busy lives are more exciting, but I wonder if they are better.

We say that we can't turn back the clock, and that is true. But we can make choices about how we live our lives, even today. We can choose to sit on the patio with Jesus, to give Him our undivided attention, to tell Him our concerns, to seek His advice and counsel, to ask His blessing, and to give Him our lives. We can spend time each day in prayer! Time reading the scriptures! Time serving the needy in Jesus' name! Even with our busy lives, we can choose to take time to look at Jesus, and to recognize Him as Lord.

Try it! Try it for a week. Try it for the rest of July. Try it for the rest of the summer. Try sitting on the patio with Jesus and see if it doesn't change your life, change the way you see the world and the issues around you.