

## **The Last Week - 3/14/10 – Deut. 15:7-11; Mark 14:1-11 – What Do You See?**

Things aren't always as they seem. Take the silhouette in the insert. What do you see? Some of us see the feature of a young woman. But if we step back, let our eyes focus differently, we can discern a second image. We see an older woman whose chin is nestled in a coat! It's all a matter of perspective.

As a child I remember having a difficult time "seeing" what my parents saw. They always saw the risk and danger in things I might do. All I could see was adventure and felt that my parents were simply raining on my parade. What did they know? We had two very different perspectives that often led us into conflict.

Mark challenges his readers to make a decision about who Jesus is. As we hear his teachings and witness his miracles, what do we see? And given what we see, how does that shape how we live? The simple truth is that Jesus isn't who or what people expected both then and now. From our vantage point this side of the resurrection, we wonder why people didn't realize he was the Messiah, the Son of the living God. But I wonder if we really see any more clearly than they did.

Not only did the religious establishment in Jesus' day have difficulty recognizing his true identity, but also the Twelve, who formed the innermost circle around Jesus, seemed blind. While the Twelve hung the title Messiah, Son of God, around Jesus' neck, what they couldn't see and didn't get was the fact that he wasn't a militaristic, warmongering Messiah, but a non-violent, suffering servant. Our culture rewards those who end up "king or queen of the hill," the ones who come out on top, not the ones who serve others without recognition. Images of a God of glory blinded their eyes to the reality of a servant-king.

A key section in Mark's Gospel is the journey from Caesarea Philippi to Jerusalem. This is what Borg and Crossan call Mark's "Lenten journey." Mark frames that journey with the healing of two blind men; at Bethsaida of Galilee (8:22-26) as the journey begins and at Jericho of Judea (10:46-52) as it ends. For Mark, the journey from Caesarea Philippi to Jerusalem is more than geography. The journey is about gaining clarity into Jesus' identity and mission. It is a means to prepare his disciples for what would happen to him when he demonstrated against Roman imperial power and violence, as well as against Jewish high-priestly authority and injustice. Jesus invites those who follow him to move beyond being spectators on the sideline to being participants in his mission to bring in the kingdom of God. But confronting the powers that be always exacts a price, and his followers need to know that before signing on.

At Caesarea Philippi Peter confesses that Jesus is the Messiah. But Jesus has a funny way of responding to that declaration. Rather than giving Peter an "Atta Boy!" Jesus "sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him." Such commands to silence in Mark do not mean, "You have it right, but keep it secret," but rather, "You have it wrong, so keep it quiet." When Peter and the others looked at Jesus, the image of a militant messiah like King David, who used violence to establish his kingdom, blinded them to his real identity and mission. After Jesus silenced that misunderstanding, he then stated openly the right perspective, namely, the Son of Man, who will suffer, be betrayed, crucified, and on the third day rise again. This is who Jesus is.

This sets up the story that serves as our Gospel text for today. This story contrasts the unnamed woman who "sees," and Judas, "one of the Twelve" who is blind. Why do you suppose this unnamed woman was praised so highly by Jesus? We don't know whether she had been privy to the three pronouncements about his betrayal, suffering, death and resurrection. Her actions indicate that she believed what Jesus had said, and she drew the obvious conclusion. Since Jesus was going to die and rise, she must anoint him beforehand. She believed the word of Jesus before any discovery of an empty tomb. Her action demonstrates the leadership cited by Jesus for himself and his followers: to be servant leaders who stoop to wash feet and are extravagant in their expressions of love. The unnamed woman is not only the first believer, but she also stands in stark contrast to Judas who simply doesn't get it.

As we journey through Lent and this last week of Jesus' life, what do we see when we look at Jesus? Who is Jesus for us? What's our perspective? Do we find ourselves more like the unnamed woman, who "sees" and then

responds with extravagant love, or like Judas, who is blinded by what he wants Jesus to be and the traditions he has been taught? Are we willing to take up our cross – the cross of bringing God’s grace and justice to bear on hunger, homelessness, special need children and adults, or other issues confronting our society? Like this unnamed woman, may our eyes be opened to see, our hearts to believe, and our hands to serve, that God might be glorified and his kingdom come.