



Becoming...

A five-week pastoral reflection series

Pastoral Reflection #3

Learning to See Through the Eyes of Jesus

The things we notice shape the stories we tell. If that's true, then another question naturally follows. Where do those stories come from? Or perhaps even more importantly: Who teaches us how to see? For those of us who follow Jesus, that question matters. Because discipleship is about more than believing what Jesus believed or doing what Jesus did. It is also about learning to see the world as Jesus sees it.

As I began asking different questions about congregations, I found myself returning to the Gospels. Not looking for a new leadership strategy. Not searching for a better organizational model.

I simply wanted to spend more time watching Jesus. So I began reading the Gospels with one question in mind: What does Jesus notice? That single question changed the way I read Scripture.

Jesus notices Zacchaeus before Zacchaeus ever speaks. Everyone else sees a tax collector. Jesus sees a dinner guest. The crowd hears Bartimaeus as an interruption. Jesus hears someone crying out for mercy—and stops. In the Temple, surrounded by impressive gifts, Jesus notices a widow quietly placing two small coins into the offering. No one else seems to see her. Jesus does.

Again and again, Jesus' attention is drawn toward people the world has learned to overlook. That isn't accidental. It tells us something about the heart of God.

But Jesus doesn't only notice different people. He notices different possibilities. Where others see fishermen, Jesus sees apostles. Where others see failure, Jesus sees forgiveness. Where others see endings, Jesus speaks of new beginnings. Again and again, Jesus refuses to let a person's present circumstances define their future. Grace gives him a different way of seeing.

Perhaps it is meant to give us a different way of seeing as well.

As I continued reading, I began noticing patterns. Not because I was looking for them. Simply because they kept appearing. Jesus is always inviting people deeper into discipleship. He is always calling forth new leaders. He is always crossing boundaries that divide people from one another. He is always restoring people to community.

Eventually I realized these weren't simply recurring themes. They were becoming lenses through which I could better notice the work of the Holy Spirit. Those lenses eventually became the language we now use across our synod:

Growing Disciples.

Developing Leaders.

Embracing Differences.

Transforming Communities.

Sometimes people ask whether those are our strategic priorities. In one sense, they are. But I think they are something deeper. They are reminders of where to look. They are questions before they are objectives. Where are disciples growing? Who is emerging as a leader? Where are walls coming down? How are communities being renewed?

Those questions don't tell us what to build. They help us notice what God is already building.

One of the beautiful surprises of reading the Gospels this way is that Jesus begins to retrain our vision. You start noticing things you once walked past. The quiet volunteer whose faithfulness has held a congregation together for years. The teenager asking questions that sound remarkably like a call to ministry. The congregation with fewer members than it had twenty years ago, yet deeper relationships with its neighborhood than ever before. The unlikely partnership that becomes a witness to reconciliation. The conversations after worship that are slowly healing old wounds.

None of those stories are flashy. Most would never make the front page of a church newsletter. But then again, neither did mustard seeds.

The stories we tell shape the future we begin to live into. If we tell stories of scarcity alone, we will begin living as though scarcity has the final word. If we tell stories of decline alone, we will begin expecting decline. But if we learn to tell stories that are truthful about our challenges and equally truthful about God's faithfulness, we begin living with hope.

Not naïve optimism. Hope. The kind of hope that trusts resurrection more than death.

I've come to believe that discipleship is, in part, an education in attention. Jesus doesn't simply teach us what to believe. He teaches us what to notice. And when we begin noticing what Jesus notices, we find ourselves telling different stories; shaped by grace, not fear; abundance, not scarcity; what the Holy Spirit is already bringing to life and not what is fading away.

Maybe that is one of the quiet miracles of following Jesus. Little by little, he teaches us to see with his eyes.

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