

**You Belong: 5. Going**  
**Mark 8:22-26**  
**September 1, 2019**  
**Pastor Steve Richards**

Do we have any runners this morning? There was a time in my life when I aspired to be a runner. I started training, wanting to enter races. I remember the first one. My favorite part of the race, which may explain why I never entered another race, was not the starting line or even the finish line but the water station. Every race of any distance has one. There are tables alongside the route that are filled with cups of water. And people are there cheering, offering words of encouragement. When you get to the water station, you are not supposed to stop, but you grab a cup of water, drink it, and discard it as quickly as possible. The water station is vital. It's vital to be hydrated, but the most important part of the water station is leaving it. But when I got to the water station, I wanted to stay there. To me, it seemed more fun than the rest of the race. This morning, we have come to the water station. This is our water station moment. We are here to be refreshed, to drink the living water for a purpose. If the first step is coming here, then the second step is to go – to get back in the race. You can't live here! There are two essential steps – or as Mark tells us, two essential touches – and we need them both.

In Mark's gospel, this story is the turning point in what Jesus came here to do. Jesus invited disciples to follow him, and they listened to his teaching and preaching. They watched him do miraculous, life-changing, life-saving things. At the beginning of chapter 8, Jesus fed a crowd of 4,000 people with seven loaves of bread and a few fish. If you were here in March when we read the entire gospel of Mark, you may recall that this was the second time Jesus fed such a large crowd. The first time, the disciples were in Galilee which was Jewish territory. But this time, much to everyone's surprise, they crossed to the other side of the Sea of Galilee where Jews didn't go. He healed a Gentile (gasp) and then he fed a crowd of 4000 Gentiles (bigger gasp). And after all of this, Jesus asked them: **Don't you have eyes? Why can't you see? Don't you have ears? Why can't you hear? Don't you remember?** (Mark 8:18) In other words, "Are you paying attention? Do you see who God loves?" To everyone's surprise, it turns out that God loves those you don't think God loves. When they thought God's love was intended for them and only those who looked like them and believed like them. The disciples had experienced a first touch, but that was only part of what Jesus came into the world to do.

In this morning's reading: **Jesus and his disciples came to Bethsaida.** This was another town on the Jewish side of the Sea of Galilee. This was familiar territory. They could relax. It was like coming home. (But don't get too comfortable...) Knowing that Jesus was in town, some people brought a blind man to him and begged Jesus to touch him – to heal him. "Come on, Jesus, we know you can do it. You did this on the other side of the lake. Now it's time for you to take care of one of our own. Take care of us." **Taking the blind man's hand, Jesus led him out of the village.** Why does Jesus take him out of the village? Why not heal the man right where he was in front of the crowd? Could it be that Jesus wanted some one-on-one time with the man? Maybe he wanted the man to have some privacy, or maybe this would be a gentle reminder that life-changing moments are not meant as public spectacles. What we see in this moment is that Jesus meets us where we are in our hurt and pain and quietly brings us to a place of healing.

But this story is not like other healing stories. In other stories, healing is immediate. This is the only time when a healing happens in two stages. Jesus leads the man outside of town, away from the crowd. It's quiet now. He spits in the man's eyes. It only worked because Jesus was using what the first century believed to be a standard medical practice. (don't try this at home) And if others had tried it, it never worked. But Jesus spits in the man's eyes and asks, "Do you

see anything?” And he does! What is the first touch: **You are loved completely and have eternal value.** Do you have a first touch story – that moment you decided to say yes, to accept the love that God extends to you? “In spite of who I am and where I’ve been and what I’ve done, God loves me.” It is what happens at the Water Station. We are here at the water station. Can you sense that he is reaching out to you?

Many of us are here today to be renewed – to be reminded of what is easy to forget. And if you are listening and don’t know or haven’t received that first touch, you don’t need to wait another moment. This could be your moment to simply, quietly receive God’s gift of love. “You are loved. You have eternal value.” That’s the first touch.

But in the story, the first touch is not enough. The man’s vision is still blurred. **The man looked up and said, “I see people. They look like trees, only they are walking around.”** It’s easy to think God’s love and Jesus’ touch is for me. Can’t we just live at the water station? It’s easy to come, to receive, to be filled, and then feel better about me, but we need a second touch. **Then Jesus placed his hands on the man’s eyes again. He looked with his eyes wide open, his sight was restored, and he could see everything clearly.** Why did he need a second touch? Not because Jesus was not able to deliver the full power that day. This story is meant for his disciples and all who would follow Jesus. This story is meant for us. We need a second touch. The proof of complete healing was not whether the man saw Jesus or himself clearly. The proof of healing came in how he saw other people. First touch: he saw people but not clearly – and Jesus was not going to leave him that way. Second touch: he now saw other people clearly. He saw faces where there had been shadows. He now had an outward focus.

If the first touch is **You are loved completely and have eternal value.** Then the second touch is **Everyone is loved completely and has eternal value.** We come to the water station for a purpose – to see what Jesus can see. And when I see what Jesus sees, that every person has value, I discover that life is not about collecting things but giving away. The story of my life will not be about me but about what bringing God’s love into the world. So when I stand in line at the coffee shop, when I encounter someone in a rough season of life and their outward appearance reflects that, when a noisy neighbor keeps you up at night – how would my behavior change if I saw every person as being loved completely and having eternal value? It is easy for us to focus on what we want and rush to buy groceries or rush to get that parking place or get to school or work on time or to accomplish what I need to do today AND fail to see clearly. Fail to realize that where I am is not accidental. What if my annoying neighbor or co-worker or overbearing boss had such value that the God of the universe strategically placed you in their life to bring a message of love and value that would help them see?

Last week, one of our members told me about advocating for someone to be hired by his company. He didn’t know the applicant but she had a felony record and had served time in jail, and he knew that HR recommended she not be hired. But he was able to overrule that recommendation. She was hired and has been a model employee for the past three months. This week, she asked to meet with him. Why did he advocate that she be hired? He told her he follows the One who is all about second chances. It’s looking at a person and seeing what God can see. Everyone is loved and has eternal value.

When we moved to this community, our younger daughter was entering the ninth grade. This would be her fifth school in five years, and she wasn’t happy about this move. She did not know anyone at Wayzata High School. Do you know the most difficult part of the day for a new student is lunch time? When she entered the cafeteria for the first time, there was nowhere to sit, no one to welcome her to their table. So instead, she began spending her lunch period in the

restroom. Finally, one day she was welcomed to a table, but those who welcomed her were not the kids that were good for her. Today, she can look back and see that, but at the time she was desperate to belong. It is the challenge we all face when we arrive anywhere. We look around for a familiar face, and often we are so focused on finding someone and finding that feeling of belonging that we fail to see what God can see – that you have been placed in the path of someone who is waiting to be approached by you.

A couple years ago, I shared this video which seems appropriate as we face the start of another school year. Take a look. [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ob2OsHYQ7PM>] “The buddy bench will make kids peas in a pod.” We need more buddy benches and not just in our schools. We need people who will see what God can see that there is someone waiting for you to step forward to be a buddy. Kids, in my earlier story, what was the one thing Allie wanted most but would not fit in her backpack? She wanted to be seen. She wanted someone to be her friend. Could you do that this week? Whether it’s at school or at work or in the line at the coffee shop. I don’t think our community needs another church, our community needs people to be Jesus. And we do this when we let Jesus touch us a second time.

Here’s my ask: This week, would you recognize where you are is no accident, so look for someone in whose path you have been placed to bless, to encourage, and to show they matter to you because they matter to God. You’ve been sent by Jesus to see people as God sees them.

### **Grow, Pray, Study for the Week of September 1, 2019**

**Weekly Prayer:** Jesus, open our eyes so that we may see both ourselves and others clearly. We are your beloved sons and daughters, fearfully and wonderfully made by you. Give us the courage and wisdom we need to live in that truth every single day. We pray this in your holy name, Amen.

### **Monday, September 2**

#### **Scripture: Matthew 5:14-16**

You are the light of the world. A city on top of a hill can’t be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a basket. Instead, they put it on top of a lampstand, and it shines on all who are in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before people, so they can see the good things you do and praise your Father who is in heaven.

**Observation:** The Jewish scripture taught that the nation of Israel was the light to the world. They were God’s chosen people. However, Jesus entered the world to proclaim that it is not one’s birthright that determines “light” status but a readiness to follow Jesus. That meant (and means) adopting the values of Jesus. He calls us to be “the light of the world” – to push back the darkness in our lives and the world around us.

**Application:** Over the years, Messiah Church has seen how God’s love changes lives when we share that love by letting our light shine. As people see the good things we do, we want them to praise, not just us, not just our church, but our Father in heaven. On a more personal level, who has been a light in your life? What have you learned about living as a channel for God’s light from their example? Thank that person or persons. And who do you know whose world you have an opportunity to brighten? Prayerfully choose one specific step you can take to bless someone – to bring the light of God’s love into their life this week.

**Prayer:** Loving God, teach me how to open my heart more and more to your light. Fill me to overflowing with that light, so that it shines out to everyone with whom I come in contact. Amen.

## Tuesday, September 3

### **Scripture: 1 Peter 2:5, 9-10**

You yourselves are being built like living stones into a spiritual temple. You are being made into a holy priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices that are acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people who are God's own possession. You have become this people so that you may speak of the wonderful acts of the one who called you out of darkness into his amazing light. Once you weren't a people, but now you are God's people. Once you hadn't received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

**Observation:** Peter wrote that God's mercy builds us into a community of people who can show forth God's marvelous light. Peter no longer believed that only a select few people got to be priests. God, he said, calls all believers (including you) to be a "royal priesthood." Our God-given mission is to "speak of the wonderful acts of the one who called you out of darkness into his amazing light."

**Application:** This week, our focus is on GOING, one of our Messiah family values. "A chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation" (verse 9). Peter applied Old Testament terms for Israel to God's people, "the church." How can we show God's grace and light by acting together in ways we can't do alone? How can a sense that together we are God's hands in the world give us energy and courage?

**Prayer:** Dear Jesus, you've asked all of us to be a part of your ongoing mission to seek and to save. Give me the courage and concern to seek to share you with the people I care about who don't know you. Amen.

## Wednesday, September 4

### **Scripture: Isaiah 52:7-8; Romans 10:11-15**

How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of a messenger who proclaims peace, who brings good news, who proclaims salvation, who says to Zion, "Your God rules!" Listen! Your lookouts lift their voice; they sing out together! Right before their eyes they see the LORD returning to Zion.

The scripture says, *All who have faith in him won't be put to shame*. There is no distinction between Jew and Greek, because the same Lord is Lord of all, who gives richly to all who call on him. *All who call on the Lord's name will be saved*. So how can they call on someone they don't have faith in? And how can they have faith in someone they haven't heard of? And how can they hear without a preacher? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, *How beautiful are the feet of those who announce the good news*.

**Observation:** In his letter to Christians in Rome, Paul stated a basic premise behind his tireless missionary work: "There is no distinction between Jew and Greek, because the same Lord is Lord of all." (verse 12) Many people in his day disagreed. He quoted their own Jewish Scriptures: "*All who call on the Lord's name will be saved*" (Joel 2:32) and "*How beautiful are the feet of those who announce the good news*" (Isaiah 52:7). God wants to reach everyone in

the world, he said. And how were all those people going to hear about God's love in Christ if no one went and shared with them?

**Application:** For us, the main issue is not between Gentiles and Jews (though we should get rid of any lingering anti-Semitic attitudes or practices). But differences in education, income, social status or sexual orientation block many people from coming to the church. Paul's challenge was: "How can they call on someone they don't have faith in? And how can they have faith in someone they haven't heard of? And how can they hear without a preacher?" What role can you play in taking the love of Jesus outside the walls of the church? Will you do it?

**Prayer:** O God, I'm so grateful your love has found me, and is reshaping my life every day. Help me not to hoard that love, but to find ways to use my gifts, talents and contacts to be a bearer of your good news. Amen.

#### Thursday, September 5

##### **Scripture: John 4:23-39**

But the time is coming—and is here!—when true worshippers will worship in spirit and truth. The Father looks for those who worship him this way. God is spirit, and it is necessary to worship God in spirit and truth." The woman said, "I know that the Messiah is coming, the one who is called the Christ. When he comes, he will teach everything to us." Jesus said to her, "I Am—the one who speaks with you." Just then, Jesus' disciples arrived and were shocked that he was talking with a woman. But no one asked, "What do you want?" or "Why are you talking with her?" The woman put down her water jar and went into the city. She said to the people, "Come and see a man who has told me everything I've done! Could this man be the Christ?" They left the city and were on their way to see Jesus. In the meantime the disciples spoke to Jesus, saying, "Rabbi, eat." Jesus said to them, "I have food to eat that you don't know about." The disciples asked each other, "Has someone brought him food?" Jesus said to them, "I am fed by doing the will of the one who sent me and by completing his work. Don't you have a saying, 'Four more months and then it's time for harvest'? Look, I tell you: open your eyes and notice that the fields are already ripe for the harvest. Those who harvest are receiving their pay and gathering fruit for eternal life so that those who sow and those who harvest can celebrate together. This is a true saying, that one sows and another harvests. I have sent you to harvest what you didn't work hard for; others worked hard, and you will share in their hard work." Many Samaritans in that city believed in Jesus because of the woman's word when she testified, "He told me everything I've ever done."

**Observation:** Jesus met a person with three strikes against her. She was a Samaritan, a woman and had multiple husbands. Jesus surprised his disciples by engaging her in honest conversation. There were religious and cultural restrictions that forbid a man, much less a rabbi such as Jesus, from speaking to her. But Jesus didn't just speak to her, he asked her for water. According to John's gospel, she became the first to tell others about Jesus! As more Samaritans came to him because of her testimony, Jesus told his disciples, who'd written off the Samaritans, "Look at the harvest."

**Application:** In what ways did the disciples not see her value, or that of the other Samaritans who made their way toward Jesus (*They left the city and were on their way to see Jesus.*)? If you had been one of the disciples, would you have been surprised, upset or happy? Who are the people you tend to look right past? How could you be a blessing?

**Prayer:** Dear Jesus, I'm so thankful for the ways your grace and love give me hope and inner peace as I learn to live beyond shame, guilt and emptiness. Help me to share that grace and love with others. Amen.

### **Friday, September 6**

#### **Scripture: 2 Corinthians 5:14-20**

The love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: one died for the sake of all; therefore, all died. He died for the sake of all so that those who are alive should live not for themselves but for the one who died for them and was raised. So then, from this point on we won't recognize people by human standards. Even though we used to know Christ by human standards, that isn't how we know him now. So then, if anyone is in Christ, that person is part of the new creation. The old things have gone away, and look, new things have arrived! All of these new things are from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and who gave us the ministry of reconciliation. In other words, God was reconciling the world to himself through Christ, by not counting people's sins against them. He has trusted us with this message of reconciliation. So we are ambassadors who represent Christ. God is negotiating with you through us. We beg you as Christ's representatives, "Be reconciled to God!"

**Observation:** In his letter to the Christians in the city of Corinth, the apostle Paul said humanity is alienated from God. But the good news, he said, is that God is not alienated from us. God loves us, wants to reconcile us to himself, and acted in Christ to bring that about. As we become a "new creation" in Christ, God makes it our mission to call others to "be reconciled to God." God wants everyone to be part of God's family.

**Application:** *The Message* paraphrased verse 20 as "Become friends with God; he's already a friend with you." Do you picture God as eager to be reconciled (in a relationship) with all human beings? How has your reconciliation with God made you "a new creature in Christ"? What is your God story? Are you ready to share your story?

**Prayer:** Lord, help me peel back the layers of resistance, pain and distrust in my heart. As I become more whole, help me to see each person I meet as your precious child. Amen.

### **Saturday, September 7**

#### **Scripture: Matthew 28:16-20; Acts 1:6-8**

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus told them to go. When they saw him, they worshipped him, but some doubted. Jesus came near and spoke to them, "I've received all authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything that I've commanded you. Look, I myself will be with you every day until the end of this present age."

As a result, those who had gathered together asked Jesus, "Lord, are you going to restore the kingdom to Israel now?" Jesus replied, "It isn't for you to know the times or seasons that the Father has set by his own authority. Rather, you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

**Observation:** The gospel-writer, Matthew, tells us that Jesus left his disciples (then and now) with final instructions. It would be the mission statement for followers through the millennia. The

risen Jesus commissioned his followers to serve him by being his witnesses, making disciples, baptizing and teaching. Having all authority from God, Jesus sent us to all nations, to teach all that he commanded. But we never go alone—he promised to be with us always.

**Application:** “‘You are my witnesses,’ declares the LORD, ‘and my servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he. Before me no god was formed, nor will there be one after me.’” (Isaiah 43:10) Today, on the authority of the risen Jesus, that is your commission if you choose to accept it. Will you be a living witness to the risen Lord, sharing what you know of his love and life? Where you are may not be accidental! What do you want to ask of Jesus to equip you for the mission?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, amazingly, challengingly, wonderfully, I am your plan to reach the world. Grow me into a person who joyfully lives out your commission. Amen.