**Do You See What I See?**

*A Sermon by The Rev. Patricia Rhoads Davis*

*Christ Church Episcopal*

Mark 1:14-20

Year B, 3 Epiphany

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The question Jesus poses to us this morning is a simple one: Do you see? I’m afraid that I’m often blind when it comes to the workings of God. For example, I can’t begin to understand how Peter and Andrew, James and John just dropped everything to tag along with an itinerant rabbi with a sketchy reputation. Were Jesus to stop by my house and say”…the kingdom of God has come near…. follow me.” I would have probably said, “That’s very kind of you to ask but I have 3 loads of wash, errands to run and people coming to dinner. Can I get back to you next week?”

But he did and they did and all these years later, we’re still stumped by the idea of following Jesus, and what in the world does it mean to say “the kingdom of God has come near”? But I think, as one of our Presidents has said, it really is a “vision thing” and we are meant to see the world and our place in it through God’s eyes. No small task when just seeing our way through the coming week is challenging enough.

And another problem is that we see things that happen and attach more mundane explanations to them, never seeing that the kingdom has come near. Perhaps you heard the story, a true story, of 2 women on a plane from Florida to Atlanta. Seated beside each other, they did as we all generally do, passed the briefest of greetings and then kept to themselves. But one woman pulled out a brochure about kidney transplants and the other had to ask why she was studying it. The first woman said she was going to Louisiana to sit with her sister who was dying of kidney failure. They had been unable to find a donor who was a good match. The other woman said she was going to Michigan to be with her nephew as they took him off life support. They might have commiserated then and there about how hard it is to lose someone you love. But a couple of phone calls from the plane allowed the hospital in Michigan to send the nephew’s information to Louisiana. And, of all the strange things, he was a perfect match. His kidneys saved the life of a woman across the country, simply because two women sat next to each other on the plane. A happy coincidence? Or the kingdom of God come near?

But of course, that’s an impressive story, a story where we can say, of course that was God drawing near. But what about those ordinary times, the times when the kingdom comes near in such a small and gentle way that we just don’t see? Like when a homeless woman sitting on a park bench sees my collar and stops me to ask for a prayer. And I just see a needy person who is going to ask me for something I don’t have time for. But I stop and we have a prayer together anyway and she thanks me for caring and bids me a blessed day. The kingdom of God has come near. Or a nursing home resident tells me he has a wonderful aide because she is so thoughtful and my thought is that she is doing what she should do anyway when, in reality, he has seen the kingdom of God come near. Or a parishioner sits down by a visitor, just to be nice, and discovers another soul hungry for God and this time, she sees that “invite, welcome, connect” is as simple as sitting in a different pew. The kingdom of God has come near. We are so often blind to the reality of God at work, ushering in the kingdom one person at a time. For wherever there is kindness, compassion, mercy, justice and grace, the kingdom of God has come near.

So I suspect those first disciples must have had better vision that I, for they saw the kingdom come near and had to be part of it, though it meant leaving work and family and all that was familiar. And that’s true for us too, because God wants to take us where we haven’t been before. In itself, that’s enough to stop many of us, for we work hard to get our life just the way we want it, to make things safe and worry-free, to know how the day and the week and the year will go and please God, don’t throw us any curves for we are pedaling as fast as we can. It’s true, isn’t it? For we want to decide who we will be and what we are to be about.

But what if, for just this coming week, we let down our guard, asked for new eyes, and looked for evidence of the kingdom come near? It’s risky I grant you. That initial reference to the arrest of John the Baptist should tell us this is no small undertaking. But “we are called not to the enjoyment of a private salvation but to a public vocation.”[[1]](#footnote-1) So I wonder, dare we pray to see through God’s eyes and then, because we see, begin to live as though the kingdom is all around us? Because Jesus doesn’t just talk about the kingdom but enacts it, embodies it, one day at a time, one person at a time, all over the place --- and we’re called, like Peter and Andrew, James and John --- we’re called to do the same!

The question Jesus poses to us this morning is a simple one: Do you see? Can you see? Can you see, with the eyes of the heart, that homeless beggar as someone who has lost all hope? Can you see that annoying co-worker as someone still wrestling with the demons of childhood, still hoping to be found worthy? Can you see that idiot in the car in front of you as someone overwhelmed and frazzled? Can you see the woman in the store with the whining child as someone just barely holding it together? Can you see? Can you see what God sees? And does that seeing move you to follow, to be part of the kingdom of God come near? It’s not that hard. It only means a prayer for God’s eyes and a commitment to kindness, compassion, mercy, justice and grace, in a world far too lacking in even those simple virtues. Jesus calls, “Follow me for the kingdom of God draws near.” Do you see what he sees?

1. Lee Barrett, Feasting on the Word, Year B, Vol. 1, p.288 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)