

A NEW PERSPECTIVE
Psalm 62:5-12; 1 Corinthians 7:29-31 & Mark 1:14-20

Theologian Leonard Sweet poses a question worth probing. How would you describe a color to someone who has been blind since birth?

What can you say about “blue” or “red” or “green” to someone who has no concept of color of bright, light, or dark?

It seems you would almost have to use examples from the senses the blind person did have such as scent, touch, smell or taste. Blue is “cold” compared to a “hot” red. Green is smooth and sweet, while yellow is sharp and pungent. Purple has the depth of a bruise. Orange may not rhyme with anything, but it feels like the sun on your face on a warm day.

Explaining the impossible to the unknowing describes much of the mission and message of Jesus. How could he communicate the vastness of divine love to individual human hearts? How could he present the fullness of time to a world that lived by months, weeks, days, hours, minutes and seconds? How could he reveal the unity of all creation to warring nations, cracked communities and fractured families?

In order to get his message across Jesus clothed the utterly unique work of God through Christ in language that seemed familiar. Jesus’ preaching and teaching was all about “the kingdom of God”. The first century world understood the concept of “kingship” all too well. The nations of the world were ruled by kings, and kings were absolute authority

figures with unquestioned control over their subjects. The Old Testament refers to the kingship of God more than any other divine quality. Israel was God's first kingdom, but in an eschatological future all the nations would recognize God's ruling status and bow down before him.

So when Jesus spoke of the "kingdom of God" his audience, especially the Torah-learned Jews, thought they knew what he was talking about. Surprise, they didn't.

Jesus was not talking about establishing a place with borders, a kind of divine fiefdom. The kingdom of God wasn't a political entity or a pie-in-the-sky, far and away dreamscape.

Peter, Andrew, James and John, along with their fathers, were professional, commercial fishermen on lake Galilee. This small, oval-shaped lake, 12 by 7 miles, had long been an important source of fish not only for Palestine, but for export to places as distant as Rome. The Jewish historian Josephus tells us that in his time (shortly after Christ) at least 130 fishing boats sailed Galilee. Their catches were salted and sent everywhere as a staple in their diets. While Peter, Andrew, James and John were not wealthy, they were not poor either. Apparently successful in their businesses, they owned their own boats and used hired help to expand their operation. Like most fishermen, they knew the importance of timing, location, bait and patience. Life wasn't easy and fishing was a 24/7 way of life dependent upon weather conditions, equipment, etc.

When Jesus calls them or asks them to follow him, Jesus is not asking them to add one more task to their busy lives. Jesus calls these first disciples into new ways of being. When Simon and Andrew leave their nets, they leave a way of life. This is even clearer with James and John, who leave not only their nets, but also their father. You might say they leave behind old ways of operating in order to take on a new perspective. Their sight has changed because they see God in their daily activity.

There is a story of a young boy who approached his slightly older sister with a question about God. “Susie, can anybody every really see God?” “Of course not, silly,” came the response. “God is so far up in heaven that no one can see God.” Some time later the boy approached his mother with the same question, “Mom, can anybody really see God?” More gently his mother answered, “No, not really. God is a spirit and dwells in our hearts, but we can never really see God.”

Although his mother’s answer was somewhat more satisfying, the boy still wondered. A few days later, the boy’s grandfather took him on a fishing trip, and the two had a great day together. As the day was winding down, the sun began to set with unusual splendor. The grandfather was enrapt by the beauty of it all, and the grandson was aware of a deep peace and contentment etched upon his grandpa’s face. “Granddad,” the boy began, a bit hesitatingly. “I wasn’t going to ask anyone else, but I wonder if you can tell me the answer to something I’ve been wondering about a long time. Can anybody ever really see God?”

The grandfather sat in thought for a few moments, then said simply, “Grandson, it’s getting so I can’t see anything else.”

Where do we see God? Often times, we think of a calling as something radical. Now there are people that experience a call to go to another country, like Mother Teresa. Or there are well known evangelists such as Billy Graham who toured the world in sharing God’s message. But most of us are called to ministry, to see God, right where we are. The men in this morning’s gospel see God in their daily activity. Notice that they do not change their vocation. Instead of fishing for fish, they will fish for people. When encountering Jesus, their perspective changes. They have new vision. They no longer have a job ... they have a ministry.

This is something we always need to ask ourselves. Do we have a job in this church and community or do we have a ministry? There is a big difference!

+ If you are doing it because no one else will, it’s a job. If you’re doing it to serve the Lord it’s a ministry.

+ If you’re doing it just well enough to get by, it’s a job. If you’re doing it to the best of your ability, it’s a ministry.

+ If you’ll do it only so long as it doesn’t interfere with other activities, it’s a job. If you’re committed to staying with it even when it means letting go of other things, it’s a ministry.

+ If you quit because no one praised you or thanked you or because things didn’t always go your way, it was a job. If you stay with it even though no one seems to notice and things aren’t always perfect, it’s a ministry.

+ If you do it because someone else said that it needs to be done, it's a job. If you are doing it because you are convinced it needs to be done, it's a ministry.

+ It's hard to get excited about a job. It's almost impossible not to get excited about a ministry.

+ If your concern is success, it's a job. If your concern is faithfulness, it's a ministry.

+ People may say "well done" when you do your job. The Lord will say "well done" when you complete your ministry.

+ An average church is filled with people doing jobs. A great church is filled with people involved in ministry!

+ If God calls you to a ministry, for heaven's sake, don't treat it like a job. If you have a job in the church, give it up and find a ministry! God doesn't want us feeling stuck in a job, but excited, fulfilled and faithful in a specific ministry.

May God bless and empower us as disciples of Jesus Christ, called to be in the ministry of this church and community. Amen.