You Are the Messiah

Mark 8:22-30

Key Verse: 8:29 “But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?” Peter answered, “You are the Messiah.”

Two weeks ago, in chapter 7, we learned that Jesus healed a deaf and mute man. When Jesus put his two fingers into the man’s ears, spit and touched the man’s tongue, and said, “*Ephphatha*” (which means ‘Be opened.), the man’s ears were opened and his tongue was loosened, and he began to speak plainly. (7:33-35) By opening the man’s ears and mouth, Jesus gave him new life. In today’s passage, Jesus opens two men’s eyes; the eyes of a blind man and the eyes of Peter. One refers to physical eyes and the other to spiritual eyes. I pray that Jesus may open the eyes of your heart today while listening this passage.

First, physical enlightenment (22-26) Look at verses 22-26. “***They came to Bethsaida, and some people brought a blind man and begged Jesus to touch him. He took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village. When he had spit on the man’s eyes and put his hands on him, Jesus asked, “Do you see anything?” He looked up and said, “I see people; they look like trees walking around.” Once more Jesus put his hands on the man’s eyes. Then his eyes were opened, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly. Jesus sent him home, saying, “Don’t even go into the village***.” There are several cases in the gospel in which Jesus opened the eyes of the blind. In John 9, Jesus opened the eyes of a born blind. At that time, Jesus spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man’s eyes, saying, “Go, wash in the Pool of Siloam”. So the man went and washed, and came home seeing. (Jn 9:6-7) This time, Jesus spit on the man’s eyes and put his hands on him. Once more, he put his hands on the man’s eyes until his sight was recovered. Jesus could have opened the man’s eyes immediately as he did in John’s gospel. But in today’s passage, he took time for the man’s healing. He did it twice. Here, we learn that there are two ways people’s eyes are opened: 1. immediate enlightenment 2. gradual enlightenment. Here, the word ‘enlightenment’ means ‘opening the eyes of one’s heart’ according to Apostle Paul (Eph 1:18) Even among Christians, some are enlightened instantly, in a moment, like when Paul was on the way to Damascus. Paul was converted in a short period of time after meeting Jesus. Others are slow and take time to change, like Nicodemus in John 3. Nicodemus was a Pharisee and member of the Jewish ruling council. He was a rabbi and teacher, but was ignorant about the spiritual world. After talking with Jesus at night, he came to realize that he needed to be born again to see the kingdom of God. (Jn 3:5) Nicodemus appears three times in John’s gospel. We see that Nicodemus was enlightened late and slowly changed even after Jesus was crucified.

In today’s passage, Jesus asked this man, “Do you see anything?” The man answered, “I see people; they look like trees walking around.” To those whose eyes are not completely opened, things look blurry and unclear. To their eyes, all things are uncertain. By the same logic, to those whose spiritual eyes are not completely opened, all things look like trees walking around. They live in the world of uncertainty. I met several students on campus whose spiritual eyes are only half or a little opened. They are not sure about what they believe. They are not sure of what to choose. They do not have a clear life direction. They live in the reality of uncertainty. Jesus advised Nicodemus, who came to him for counselling, saying, “No one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.” (Jn 3) It took time for Nicodemus to open his spiritual eyes and see the kingdom of God. Still, he was blessed because he came to know how to open his spiritual eyes from Jesus.

Last week, I talked with a student who was converted to Buddhism. I asked him what he came to know about and how he was enlightened. The concept of enlightenment in Buddhism is called “Nirvana”, which means “the state of perfect peace and happiness.” Nirvana is achieved when people are completely free from all desires, whether they are good or evil. Mr. Buddha went into a deep mountain to be free from all desires. I told him that the concept of enlightenment in Christianity is to find ourselves as sinners in the presence of God. Enlightenment is to experience the existence of God and his power and love. It is the state of being born again. In today’s passage, the blind man experienced the power of God and Christ’s love. He could see everything clearly. His physical eyes were opened by the power of God and grace of Jesus. Still, we are not sure if this man was enlightened spiritually. But we are sure that God provided an opportunity for him to open his eyes to see Jesus. We have to wait until our own eyes are opened. It takes time. We have to pray until the eyes of our hearts are enlightened by the love of Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit. If it is opened half or little, if you cannot see clearly, don’t give up. Pray, wait, and study the word of God hard. The day will come when your eyes are opened and you are born again!

Second, spiritual enlightenment (27-30) Look at verses 27-28. “***Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked them, “Who do people say I am?” They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets***.” Finally, Jesus and his disciples were away from the demanding crowd. His disciples must have expected a quiet vacation with their master Jesus without any disturbances. Suddenly, Jesus asked them a question regarding people’s opinions of himself. They answered that some said Jesus was John the Baptist because both preached the message of repentance, and that they were similar in many ways. Others said that Jesus was Elijah because the Prophet Malachi prophesied that a person like Elijah would appear in the last day. (Mal 4:5) Still, others thought that Jesus was one of the prophets, as modern Muslim and Jews think. Today, some people say that Jesus is a great revolutionist or moralist. Mahatma Gandhi believed that Jesus was member of the non-violent civil rights movement. Before I was enlightened, I thought that Jesus is one of the four greatest teachers along with Buddha, Mohammad, and Confucius.

Next, Jesus asked his disciples the second question. Look at verse 29a. “***But what about you?” he asked, “Who do you say I am?***” This time, Jesus asked them about their personal opinions and beliefs about himself. The first question might have been easy to answer, like taking a multiple-choice quiz. But the second question was a subjective question that required their personal beliefs. When I asked the same question to our students, they were hesitant to answer clearly. They took some time to express their beliefs. “Who do you say I am?” “What do you think of Jesus?” How did his disciples answer?

***Peter answered, “You are the Messiah.***” (29b) Peter was bold and courageous to answer first. The Bible says that Peter made some mistakes because of his abrupt character. His story of denying Jesus three times before being reinstated with Jesus later is well known. Here, though, his answer was perfect. He got it right! Jesus is the Messiah. He is the Christ. The word ‘Messiah’ is in Hebrew and ‘Christ’ is in Greek, both meaning ‘the Anointed.’ The Messiah is chosen by God and anointed by Him. In the ancient days, three people were anointed by God: the king, priest, and prophet. Jesus served all three positions as king, priest, and prophet. When we say that Jesus is the Messiah, it is more than just giving him a title. The Messiah must suffer and die on the cross for our sins. His blood has the power to cleanse all our sins, sins in the past, sins at present, and sins in the future. And the blood of Jesus has the power to forgive our sins and make us righteous before God. His resurrection became the first-fruit of resurrection for all those who follow him. His resurrection opened the way to heaven and for our eternal life in the kingdom of God. Jesus did this as the Messiah.

When Peter said that Jesus was the Messiah, he was referring to more than just his redemptive work, but our enlightenment as well. Let’s go back to John 4. When Jesus met the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well, she asked a very meaningful question to Jesus. “I know that the Messiah is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us.” (Jn 4:25) The Samaritan woman was waiting for the Messiah, who could answer all her life questions. Who was she? She was a sinful woman. She married five times, divorced five times and lived with a boyfriend who was not her husband. She was a thirsty woman. She did not know why she was not satisfied with men, even though she had changed them six times. To her, life was a mystery and full of questions. When Jesus introduced her to the living water welling up to eternal life, she asked Jesus right away for the living water. Jesus said that he is the living water, that he is the Messiah who would explain everything for her, she was enlightened on the spot. Her eyes were opened to see God in Jesus. She found herself standing in the presence of God. So, she left her water jar and went to her town to call her people, saying, “*Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah*?” (Jn 4:29) Jesus explained everything about her: that she was a sinner, she got lost in her sin, and that she needed the forgiveness of sin for her salvation. She was enlightened. God opened her spiritual eyes to see Jesus as the Messiah.

As for me, I confess that Jesus is my Messiah and Lord. This is because not he only died for my sin on the cross, but he also explained everything to me. When I was in college, I didn’t know why I had to live, how to live meaningfully and truthfully. I was sad that I was living without knowing the meaning and purpose of my life. Indeed, life was not just for eating, sleeping, and having fun. Jesus explained everything for me and answered my questions. Jesus said, “*I came from the Father... and am going back to the Father.* (Jn 16:28)” As Jesus said, my life came from God and is going back to God. Jesus also said, “*Because I live, you also will live.*” (Jn 14:19) As Jesus lived again, I will live again. Jesus lived for the glory of God. Like him, I also live for the glory of God. When Jesus asked me the same question he asked his disciples, I could not but confess, “Yes, Lord. You are the Messiah. You are everything to me.” This was the moment I was born again. This was the hour I was enlightened. This was the day my spiritual eyes were opened to see the kingdom of God.

In Matthew’s gospel, Jesus promised to build his church on Peter’s confession. People built St. Peter’s Cathedral in Vatican City, where Peter had been martyred. God has built numerous churches around the world based on this confession of faith, “Jesus is the Messiah.” I pray for all of you to make such a confession for your salvation. Paul said in Romans 10:9-10. “*If you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved.*” Amen!