

**March 25, 2018  
Mark 14:12-16, 22-25  
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Creekside COB**

### **“What Do You See?”**

**Good morning! Today we celebrate Palm Sunday and stand on the threshold of Holy Week and Easter. For me as your pastor, and for any of you who are deacons coordinating Love Feast or Worship Team members setting up the chancel and ordering flowers, or Christian Ed or Outreach folks and anyone else who is preparing for our Easter Egg Hunt, or Fellowship Team making Easter breakfast, this may be the busiest week of the church year. I know that some of you will be helping with more than one of these things -- God bless you. I know you are busy people, so I'm going to get right to the point of my sermon this morning. Here it is: God's truth does not depend on our perception. Got that? I'll say again, just in case you have plans to drift off in the next 15 or 20 minutes: God's truth does not depend on our perception.**

**Perception is more complex than simply being able to see something with our eyes. Perceiving implies knowing or understanding, but we often use the words perceiving and seeing interchangeably. Do you see what I mean? If you nodded “Yes” it isn't because you could actually see anything -- spoken words are invisible -- by if you see what I mean, you understand what I'm trying to explain. Throughout the gospel accounts of Jesus ministry, Jesus encounters men who have been born blind. It is an opportunity for miraculous healing, but it is also warning to religious leaders and anyone else who thinks they see, perceive, and understand clearly -- when they really don't understand at all. The gospel of John makes this point the clearest in the 9<sup>th</sup> chapter, when Jesus heals a man who was blind from birth, and the Pharisees question the man and bully him when he sticks to his story and finally drive him out of the synagogue. When Jesus hears this, he finds the man and tells him, “I came so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind.” The**

**Pharisees overhear this and say, “What? We’re not blind are we?” and Jesus tells them, “As long as you keep saying ‘We see,’ your sin remains.”**

**The phrase, “Seeing is believing,” is not always true. I think especially when we consider the events of Palm Sunday, Holy Week and Easter, what we believe determines what we see. Believing is seeing. I want to give you some examples from our texts today. The first text Lisa read is Mark’s account of Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem. In Mark’s gospel, this happens immediately after Jesus’ healing of Bartimaeus, a blind beggar who sees what others do not: that Jesus is the Son of David and Jesus has the power to make him see. That insight gives Bartimaeus the faith to call out to Jesus and be healed.**

**After this healing, Jesus and his disciples are approaching Jerusalem, and Jesus send two of them to bring a colt -- it could have been a young donkey -- for him to ride. Jesus rides the colt into Jerusalem, a city occupied by Roman soldiers. What do Roman soldiers see? The worst parade ever. No war horses, no prisoners, no victory for the empire. Just some Jewish hick on a donkey with a couple guys walking along side. And the Jewish people in Jerusalem, what did they see? A spectacle, an excuse to blow off some steam and discharge some of their frustration about being occupied by the Romans. They’ve heard stories about Jesus -- maybe here was the guy who would finally stick it to the Romans and help them make the Jewish nation great again. Why not? Hosanna! Save us! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! And the Pharisees, the religious leaders, what do they see? A threat to their authority. Jesus has been critical of them and the people love him. The highest ranking religious leaders have been carefully cultivating relationships with the Roman governors, and Jesus could wreck their chances for political influence. This guy is trouble, and he has to be stopped. They might have to talk the Romans into executing him. And how about you: what do you see? Remember, what we believe will determine what we see. Is this just a guy in a story that we learned in Sunday School a long time ago, or is this the Son of God, consciously fulfilling a divine purpose? All of these perceptions are true for the people who see them, but God’s truth does not depend on our perception. If Jesus taught us anything, it is**

**that no one except the Son completely knows the mind of the Father. Our understanding of God's truth is always incomplete.**

**How about this meal that Mark describes in chapter 14? It begins in an ordinary way, with Jesus sending two of the disciples to find a guest room where they can celebrate Passover together. It sounds like the usual observance -- Passover was the meal which commemorated the Hebrews' escape from Egypt, when the angel of death passed over the homes that had the blood of a lamb over their doorways. The blood of the lamb saved their lives. Do you think the disciples understood that they were sharing the last supper they would ever have with the Lamb of God? That he would be betrayed and crucified and that his blood would save them from death? The gospels don't give any indication that the disciples understood what they were seeing. When Jesus talks about being betrayed, Peter is quick to say, "Others will leave you, but I will not. Even if I have to die with you, I will not deny you." Jesus took the elements of the Passover meal and told his friends they were his own body and blood. What do you see?**

**This Thursday evening -- the same day of the week that the disciples gathered for supper with Jesus -- we will gather to remember that Passover meal. We will speak some of the same words that Jesus said to his disciples that evening, and we will eat the bread and drink the cup of the covenant, poured out for many. What will we see, I wonder? A few people who gather to participate in a tired old ritual, or an opportunity to demonstrate that we, too, are part of the body of Christ? God's truth does not depend on our perception. John's gospel includes an account of that Thursday evening meal and tells how Jesus knelt and washed his disciples' feet: a shocking reversal of the roles of servant and teacher. The disciples, at least Peter, saw this as embarrassing and inappropriate, "Lord, you will never wash my feet!" Peter said. All Peter could see was that the social etiquette of Jesus washing his feet was all wrong. Peter couldn't see God's truth: Jesus was demonstrating that his disciples were also his friends, and that Jesus came to serve them, and that they should also serve one another. This week it will be difficult for some folks from Creekside to see beyond the awkwardness of kneeling to wash someone else's feet, or perhaps the even more awkward experience of allowing someone else to wash their feet. Those are valid**

**perceptions -- I get that -- but it doesn't change the truth of what Christ did, and what he told us to do. God's truth does not depend on our perception.**

**While Tim and I traveled in Ireland this month, we saw churches that were abandoned or in ruins: picturesque stone structures without roofs, and with deteriorating walls. Sometimes the cemetery plots nearby were still tended, and sometimes not. Church attendance across Europe, as in the United States, is declining. You might think God's word is dying -- you'd be wrong. The church and the church structures that are hundreds of years old may be in decay, but the word of God does not depend on our structures. It is not contained by buildings or administrators or creeds. There is no question that we will need to find different and innovative ways of being the church in the coming centuries; we will have to find other ways to share the word of God and to be the body of Christ in the world. But God's truth does not depend on our perception. God's truth is everlasting: we need to find ways to allow God's truth change our lives, because our lives will never change God's truth.**

**I would invite you -- strongly encourage you -- to read one of the gospel accounts of Jesus' crucifixion as part of our preparation for Holy Week and Easter. We have been walking through the gospel of Mark this Lent. Mark is the shortest gospel, and the account of Jesus' last days in Mark, chapter 15, is fairly brief. You will hear most of that chapter -- not quite all of it -- during our Good Friday service. As you read and imagine those events in Jesus' life, ask yourself, what did those people see? A political agitator? A criminal? A threat to religious power and stability? And then ask yourself, what do I see? What is the truth that God is revealing in this passage? Can I say, along with the Roman centurion in Mark 15:39, "Truly, this man was God's Son!"**

**We're going to join in singing a hymn by one of the most respected hymn lyricists of all time, Sir Isaac Watts. His text to "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross" captures for me the truth which lies beyond what we see when we look at the cross: not an ordinary man, but the prince of glory; not my own accomplishments, but the sacrifice of Christ; not only sorrow, but God's love flowing down.**