



Believing What You Hear

(Matthew 9:27-31)

Fourth Week in Lent, March 22nd, 2017

First Federated Church, Peoria, Illinois

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At 94 years old Alison is still vivacious. She is lively. She is animated. She talks freely and candidly, but she never speaks ill about anything or anyone else. She has a particular fashion sense. One that keeps her once golden curls swooping and flowing like Goldilocks. Alison is a delight.

Lately, however, she has quieted some. Instead of a grand entrance with a warm hello and a hop in her step like a child going out to play on the first day of spring, Alison has slowed. She now carefully shuffles one foot in front of the other, never raising her heels off the ground. Her arms are always outstretched. One to the front and the other to her side. Her fingers search like whiskers to detect what might be at her side or before her so she doesn't trip and tumble to the ground.

After decades of near perfect vision Alison's eyesight is diminishing. The doctors have diagnosed her with macular degeneration, a somewhat common disease, which causes blindness for those afflicted by it. No matter her limited sight she always manages to get herself to Thursday morning Bible Study on time. She arrives overjoyed, ready to listen to the word of God and to talk about what God has revealed to her through the Scripture lesson.

Not long ago the Bible Study Group dwelled in Matthew 9:27-31. After Alison heard the passage read aloud and after a time of silent reflection she had something to say. She peered across the group as best she could and said "I can't see you, but if you speak I know who you are." She paused briefly and then went on to say "The two blind men in the text knew Jesus not because they had seen him, but because they heard him. He spoke and they knew he was the Messiah, the promised Son of David."

If this is true and I believe it is, why then did Jesus asked the blind men “Do you believe I am able to do this?” It is a curiosity that Jesus would ask this because we as reformed people understand God to be omniscience. That is to say, God is all knowing. God is the supreme know-it-all. Every detail of every part of creation is known by God. Nothing is unknown to God. So why would Jesus ask a question when he knew the answer? I don’t think it was to test the blind men. I think it was so that the other people in the house, those who could see Jesus, those who were witness to his miraculous healing powers, and those who would follow Jesus millennia later would understand faith.

Our theme verse for the Youth Group Stronghold retreat this year was Hebrews 11:1 which says “Now faith is the assurance of things hope for, the conviction of things not seen.” Alison quietly pointed this out as the Bible study group talked about Matt. 9:27-31. The blind men in the text knew Jesus not because they has seen him, but because they heard him. The youth grappled with defining faith and what it means to have faith in things unseen that weekend.

Faith isn’t about seeing something and then believing it to be true. The blind men hadn't seen Jesus, but they believed he was the Messiah. Faith is the wholehearted trust in God especially when we can’t perceive the answer or outcome. Alison knows this truth this just like the blind me did. She will tell you she hasn’t seen Jesus but she has listened to him speak through the Bible. By the word of God, believing what she has heard, she knows who Jesus is, the Messiah, the Son of David, and has followed him with her heart, her might, and her soul even though she hasn’t seen him. That is faith. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.