

# SEQUOYAH HILLS PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

## “Food for the Road: Safari Suppers”

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**Mark 8:22-26**

November 16, 2025

Next week we’ll wrap up this series “Food for the Road,” a look at this particular section of the Gospel of Mark, and believe or not, in two weeks we’ll begin the season of Advent, so first a short word on what we’ll look at as we celebrate and anticipate the coming of Christ anew.

One of the core claims of the Christian faith is perhaps one of the simplest, that God sent his Son Jesus. Put simply, God dwells among us, or as it’s put in the Gospel of John, the Word became flesh and dwelled among us. This miracle of the incarnation, of God indwelled in human flesh, is a big part of the Advent and Christmas season. The fact that Jesus is born in the first place, that God is born, that God grows up, in a manner of speaking, kind of short circuits the brain when you start to think about it, but at its root is this good news embedded in the name attributed to Jesus in this season: Emmanuel, God with us. So what does it mean for God to dwell with us? Why is that important? How might we dwell more fully in the presence of God and more faithfully in the presence of others? That’s what we’ll look at this Advent season.

As we continue in the Gospel of Mark, we find what might seem like a standard fare healing—standard fare is a relative term, as far as miracles go—but with much to teach us about how God has worked and may be at work within you this very day.

Let’s go to God’s Word together. [Read passage, Mark 8:22-26.] The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.** Will you pray with me?

Spirit of God, we pray for your presence within us and among us this day. We pray that by your power and grace you would bring about a new degree of cleansing, of repentance, of healing within us, that we might hear your Word anew this morning. And for the Word spoken and heard today, may it not be mine but yours. Amen.

You ever been reading a book and skipped ahead to the end to find out what happens? Or maybe, and I’m guilty of this, watch a show or a documentary or true crime sort of thing and, not wanting to wait through all the episodes or something, you go to Wikipedia and look up what actually happened? You know, cut through all the stuff in the middle, just go to the finished product.

I’m sure there’s some psychological factor that could be drawn out of such a practice. Wanting control, maybe. Wanting to avoid anxiety or uncertainty or suspense. Or maybe a desire to appreciate all the little layers or foreshadowing that might get layered in along the way. I don’t know.

But nevertheless, you skip ahead in that book, that movie, that show, and you lose something. You lose something about the experience, the steps, the process and progress along the way.

While reading this passage, some may have wondered why Jesus didn't just skip to the end, you know, just fast forward to the end result and get that done as efficiently as possible.

Jesus and his disciples come to the town of Bethsaida on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, at which point a blind man is brought to him. There in the village, presumably surrounded by another crowd of people, he takes the man by the hand and leads him back out of the village—there's something noteworthy about that in and of itself. Once a step away from the crowd, he puts saliva on the man's eyes and lays his hands on him.

Now this is where it gets a little quirky. It says, “[Jesus] asked him, ‘Can you see anything?’ And the man looked up and said, ‘I can see people, but they look like trees, walking.’”

This suggests a number of things. One, it indicates that the man had become blind at some point during his life, not my birth, since how otherwise would he know what trees looked like to begin with?

But it also suggests that the healing wasn't complete. The man's vision was fuzzy, it seems. He could see people, but they looked like trees walking, so maybe he just saw shapes, but not definition.

Now, to be sure, healing a man from blind to being able to make out shapes just with a bit of spit is pretty powerful stuff, but this doesn't feel quite like Jesus' MO. The man wasn't fully healed. His sight was blurry.

Not to leave the deed undone, Jesus lays his hands on him again, and the text clarifies, “His sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly.” Now after the second time around, the whole thing is done.

But that's what makes this a bit quirky, even confusing. Why'd it take two tries? Was this a particularly difficult eye problem to heal? Or maybe Jesus was a bit tired? Does that even compute? Can the Alpha and Omega get tired to the point that his ability to heal take a couple of doses? Those are interesting questions. Kind of gets into to what degree one thinks Jesus as the Incarnate Son of God is kind of this walking, talking all-knowing, all-powerful Superman all the time, and to what degree in his fully human nature he has taken on the limitations of the human condition, namely, sometimes not knowing stuff, or sometimes getting tired. Those are interesting questions. And if those are hold ups for you, let's talk some more, but those are not really the questions I'd hope for us to focus on today.

Instead, I wonder if for today, we put those questions on the shelf and look simply at the reality that, for the blind man at least, the healing the change didn't come all at once.

You ever done a safari supper? Those with long memories may remember a brand of frozen dinner called Safari Suppers, made by the company Libbyland.

Anyway, they made these frozen kids dinners called Safari Supper, with elephants and lions on the packaging, but it was like other frozen dinners. In the single package, you had little compartments for chicken, another for spaghetti and meatballs, another for corn, and another for chocolate pudding. Apparently, you put all of that all at once into the oven to cook it.

Apparently had a little earworm jingle that went along with. “If it says Libby, Libby, Libby, on the label, label, label, nothing's better, better, better, on your table, table, table.”

And I guess the name was because kids would presumably go from one little compartment to the next, like an expedition, a safari, but when I saw it—and not just that but any kind of frozen dinner with that kind of altogether menu—and I thought, yeah that's a design flaw. You put spaghetti and meatballs on the same plate,

same tray as chocolate pudding in front of kid, I don't care how good the meatballs are. They're not getting touched until the chocolate pudding is gone.

But I get the intent behind it. Safari Supper and all.

But apparently that name "Safari Supper" has a different connotation too. It's another way of saying "progressive dinner." I hadn't heard that before, so I don't know if it's a regional thing, but if you've ever done a "progressive dinner" or a "safari supper," you know this premise.

One meal, shared among friends and family, but split up among a few different hosts. Our youth are doing one next month as it happens. But you get it. You start at one house, maybe have an appetizer. Go to another, have another small course. Yet another, maybe the main course. Still another, maybe dessert. Finally another, maybe coffee or something to wrap up the evening.

And it's very nice, and you kind of split up the burden of hosting the whole meal, and everyone's joining in for it. It's fun; it's pleasant.

But if you're on one of these safari suppers, would you stop after the second house? I mean sure, folks have stuff going on, and among friends, no worries, come to what you can, but in general, if you've signed on to do a progressive dinner, do you go into it thinking, "Yeah I'll just go to the first two, and then I'll consider it done"? No. That's misunderstanding the premise of the whole meal. It comes in stages, right? You go to one place, then another, then another. And if you only do one or two, or if you go in for one but then leave and then rejoin for the last one, it's not really the full effect, is it? It's not what's intended. You don't get it all at once, and you don't get all of it, even proportionally at one stop.

And I wonder if this healing of this blind man might teach us that God doesn't always work—in fact I'd say usually doesn't work—in that all-at-once kind of way.

I mean, sure, sometimes there's the one moment this way, another moment that way, a Road to Damascus conversion, a moment of clarity, I once was blind but now I see, boom, that point of change and conviction. Sometimes God works that way, in Scripture, in life. I know some of you have stories like that, and they're powerful; they're inspiring.

But even in those life-changing moments, life still continues. We still grow; we still change; and more to the point, God's still at work.

For this man in this story, there was that stage at which he could see, but just shapes, just "trees walking," as he put it. It was a sign of things to come, of the full healing that Christ would bring, but I wonder if it was also a reminder to him of how he once was, a literal glimpse of what things used to look like for him before he lost his sight.

That taste of sight, of light, that hint of restoration is sometimes enough to stir us to seek more of it, isn't it?

For the man, that time of seeing only "trees walking" was mere minutes, it seems. But that sort of thing can last days, months, years, that season of healing, yes, but the work, the change isn't done.

Do you know a season like that in your life? A time when you now recognize, oh, that was God setting up something even better to come, but in that season you were given just a glimpse, a reminder even, of how things could be, but the full change was coming.

Some time ago I spoke with a friend of mine, and as conversations sometimes do when you're a preacher, it turned to matters of faith, of God. And I distinctly remember my friend sharing, "God's doing something. I don't quite know what. But something is changing." For him, it ended up being a change in professional direction. He had realized that what he was doing professionally was chewing him up and burning him out spiritually, physically, emotionally, but he couldn't see clearly to what was coming next, to what God had in store, just a glimpse that what he had been doing was so harmful to him.

Now, you speak to him, he's far more content, far more whole, but he'd be the first to admit it didn't all come at once. The transition was scary, professionally scary, financially scary. It taught him a lot about faith and trust, for one, and that's good, but it wasn't easy. Sometimes following God, letting God work a change in your life means letting God put some spit in your eye, and we tend not to like that sort of thing. We get defensive. We get resistant.

But God's not done with us.

Friends, the walk of discipleship we might consider to be something like a progressive dinner, a safari supper. Rarely is it so linear, of course. Internally as a staff, we try to develop something we refer to as a discipleship pathway or an invitational pathway. And by that, we mean, if we recognize that an individual may be in one place, what might we encourage that person to step into next in their walk of faith. And it's not a prescription, not like a series of train cars that everyone goes from one to the next in the same sequence, but in general, yeah, if one has grown more in a worshipful relationship with God, perhaps the next step in connecting in fellowship in a small group. Or if one has gotten connected in the shared life of the church, perhaps the next step is branching out in a manner of service within the church or in the community, or maybe growing in spiritual practices like prayer or more in-depth Scripture study or growth in sacrificial generosity.

The point is, you don't just hop from one stage to another stage and they're all kind of outlined and chronological, but there are seasons; there is growth; there is change. The way Christ moved in your life in one season may not be the same way his Spirit moves in your life in this season or in the next, and that's a good thing.

The important part, the blessed part along the way is the glimpses we get of what's to come, those trees walking. It can be scary because it's blurry, it's uncertain. But it's also a reminder that what you're being led into is far better, far greater, far more glorious than anything that has come before.

What might be coming into focus for you today?

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.