Sunday, February 10, 1985
STOP, LOOK AND LOOK AGAIN!
Mark 1:14-22

A mother wrote: “When my second child was in the first grade, she came home from school one day and told me that a boy in her class had been given a “D” on a drawing because he had colored his tree orange. The mother’s response was, ‘Can you think of any instances when a tree might be orange?’ The daughter thought for a moment and then said, ’In the Fall.’ She then named the other fall leaf colors. Then I said, ‘Can you think of any other color leaves might be, or can you think of a famous painter who has painted his trees a color other than green?” After a little coaxing she said, ‘Oh, yes, Claude Monet painted his trees pink.’ ‘Right, because that is the color they looked to him at dawn,’ I said…. ‘Now, if you look outside at night and it is very dark, what color do the reply. ‘Okay then, we know that the leaves of trees can look or be red, black, brown, green, yellow, orange, pink, and maroon, depending on the situation.’ ‘That’s right,’ she said, and skipped off to draw a batch of pink trees.”

What eyes some people have and what wonderful imaginations! They see things we don’t ordinarily see or they see things that we could see if only we stopped to look and look again. They know there’s more to the world than first meets the eye. They know there’s more than one right answer to many of the questions that confront us.

A professor of physics from Washinton University in St. Louis, tells this story. He says he received a call from a colleague who asked if he would be the referee on the grading of an examination question. This colleague was about to give a student a zero for his answer to a physics question, while the student claimed he should receive a perfect score and would if the system were not set up against the student. The instructor and the student agreed to submit this to an impartial arbiter, and this professor was selected.

He went to his colleague’s office and read the examination question: “Show how it is possible to determine the height of a tall building with the aid of a barometer.”

The student had answered: “Take the barometer to the top of the building, attach a long rope to it, lower the barometer to the street, and then bring it up, measuring the length of the rope. The length of the rope is the height of the building.”

The professor pointed out to the instructor that the student had a strong case for full credit, since he had answered the question completely and correctly. On the other hand, if full credit were given, it could well contribute to a high grade for the student in his physics course. A high grade is supposed to certify competence in physics, but the answer did not confirm this. He suggested that the student have another try to

answering the question. He was not surprised that the instructor agreed but was surprised that the student agreed.

The professor who was the arbiter gave the student six minutes to answer the question with the warning that his answer should show some knowledge of physics. At the end of five minutes, he had not written anything, so the professor asked if he wished to give up, but the student said “No.” He had many answers to this problem, he was just thinking of the best one. The professor excused himself for interrupting him and asked the student to please go on. In the

next minute he dashed off his answer which read: “Take the barometer to the top of the building and lean over the edge of the roof. Drop the barometer, timing its fall with a stopwatch. Then, using the formula S=1/2 at2, calculate the height of the building.”

At this point, the professor asked the instructor if he would give up. He conceded, and gave the student almost full credit.

In leaving, the professor recalled that the student had said that he had other answers to the problem, so he asked him what they were. “Oh, yes,” said the student. “There are many ways of getting the height of a tall building with the aid of a barometer. Out on a sunny day and measure the height of the barometer, the length of its shadow and the length of the shadow of the building, and by the use of a simple proportion, determine the height of the building.”

“Fine, the professor said, “and what are the other answers?” “Well,” said the student, “there is a very basic measurement that you will like. In this method, you take the barometer and begin to walk up the stairs. As you climb the stairs, you mark off the length of the barometer along the wall. You then count the number of marks, and this will give you the height of the building in barometer units. A very direct method!”

“Of course, if you want a more sophisticated method, you can tie the barometer to the end of a string, swing it as a pendulum, and determine the value of “G” at the street level and at the top of the building. From the difference between the two values of “G,” the height of the building can, in principle, be calculated.”

Finally, said the student, “There are many other ways to solve the problem.” “Probably the best,” he said, “is to take the barometer to the basement and knock on the superintendent’s door. When the superintendent answers, you speak to him as follows: ‘Mr. Superintendent, here I have a fine barometer. If you will tell me the height of this building, I will give you this barometer.”

At this point, the professor asked the student if he really did not know the conventional answer to this question. He admitted that he did, but said that he was fed up with high school and college instructors trying to teach him how to think. To use the scientific method. And to explore the deep inner logic of a subject in a pedantic way. Rather than teaching students to see that there is often more than one way of approaching a question and a subject. Why not teach students to broaden their vision.

This young man had a vivid imagination. He liked to look at a situation in every possible way! And he saw things that others didn’t see.

What’s all this got to do with our text for this morning and with the Christian faith? Just this: Jesus could see unlimited possibilities in people he met. Whereas others in seeing the same people. Had only limited vision. The gospel of mark reports that Jesus was passing by the sea of galilee, and he saw Simon and Andrew. The brother of Simon. Casting a net into the sea. For they were fisher men. Probably. If you and I had been walking along that same seashore. What we would have seen is two fisher man. But Jesus saw more — much more.

When Jesus spotted Andrew and Simon. This was no casual glance. Of course. He saw what other people saw — two individuals going about their everyday occupations of being fisher men — but he saw more. He saw Simon and Anderew in all their potentialities. Not only as

they were. But as they could be. He saw them as possible disciples — individuals who could do amazing things for God.

The little girl who colored the tree orange was like Jesus. She knew that trees are often green — everyone knows that. But she also knew more. She knew that trees could be orange. Or pink. Or black. Or maroon. Or yellow. Or brown. She saw the trees in all their potential.

So also. The physics student who was asked to determine the height of a tall building with the aid of a barometer — he knew the conventional answer. But he also saw much more.

The gospel stories are filled with examples of Jesus seeing what others missed. He saw Zacchaeus up in the tree and he saw in him a man who was ready to be changed — a person who could be turned around. All the other people saw was a tax collector and an individual they hated. They had him type. He would never change.

But Jesus frequently saw what others could not see. He saw the woman casting all her living into the alms box. He saw here extreme generosity. How much the world would be blessed if we could say. “We have the eyes of Christ.” How much would come from a heightened sense of seeing; the ability to see people not as blurred objects in the landscape. And often only from the point of view of their possible usefulness to us; but to see them with a dedicated imagination — to see them within their possibilities.

Think how often we type-cast people. She’s a conservative! He’s a liberal! He’s a jerk and always will be! She’s on welfare! He’s stupid! She’s ugly! With one two words we limit our vision and we limit people.

Our Christian faith reminds us that there’s so much more to god’s creation than we see at first glance! A large part of the ministry of Jesus was to open people’s eyes — to give sight to the blind; and blindness is not limited to the simple physical sense of seeing. Jesus wanted people to stop. Look and then look again!

One way to judge your religious faith is to ask: Does it help me broaden my vision. Or does it narrow and limit my vision? If your religious faith doesn’t broaden your vision. Then something’s wrong with it. Our Christian faith should enable every one of us to see each individual we meet as a child of God and therefore as our brother or sister.

Today is boy scout Sunday. Here and across the country. One of the purposes of the scout movement is to help young people stop. Look and look again. It helps young people see things they had not noticed before. And understand things not understood before.

As I remember it. The scout law goes like this: “A scout is trustworthy. Loyal. Helpful. Friendly. Courteous. Kind. Obedient. Cheerful. Thrifty. Brave. Clean. And reverent.” All these are for the purpose of broadening our vision.

What then are some additional ways that can help us begin to see things we have been missing?

Before we can see much more than with a casual glance. We have to stop! Remember the old railroad warnings used to say: “Stop. Look and listen!” There are things we cannot see while we are moving. Perhaps all of us need lessons in the art of stopping.

Later in the gospel of mark. There's a story about Jesus healing a blind beggar by the side of the road. The beggar had been around so long. Nobody noticed him. His name was Bartimaeus. Jesus and his disciples were leaving Jericho. And a large crowd was following him. Bartimaeus was sitting by the side of the road in his usual place. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth who was coming by. He shouted. "Jesus. Son of David. Have mercy on me." The people around him told him to be quiet. But he shouted all the more. At that point in the story. Mark reports. "Jesus stopped!" Then he said. "Call that man and bring him to me." Bartimaeus was brought to him and Jesus asked him, "what do you want me to do for you?" Bartimaeus answered, "Let me receive my sight." And Jesus said to him, "Go your way. Your faith has made you well." And immediately he received his sight and began to follow Jesus on the way.

Jesus stopped! The art of stopping is a high art!

So often I've wanted to say to people— "stop!" Take a look around you. Look at what you're doing to your family with your busyness. Look at what you're doing to yourself. Stop! Look at your children and then look again. See them as they are now — not as you want them to be. Or as they were in the past. Stop! Love them! Enjoy them! They are going to be gone before you know it.

Stop! Hug your spouse. Huc your children. Tell your friends how much you appreciate them. A prayer I heard recently said. "God. I keep thinking about that 17-year-old girl who told me her mother hadn't hugged her since she was in the 7th grade. What makes people hold their hugs back? Is there someone waiting for a hug from me?"

Stop! Open your eyes! Jesus is saying that to you and to me as much as he was saying it to the blind man. Open your eyes! Receive your sight!

Begin to take time to look at and appreciate and enjoy the world around you. Watch the sunrise. Appreciate the sunset. Stop! Look and look again!

Stop! And begin to see beauty wherever and in whatever form you may find it. The beauty of God's creation is all around us.

For you who don't have to work at their regular jobs on Sunday — to you. Jesus says. "Stop!" whatever you are doing and take time to worship. Being in worship is a time of stopping your usual round of activities to be more aware of God in your life and God in the world.

Take time each day in your life to stop. Look and look again. You will see things you have never noticed before and your life will be richer for it! You will see God in places you were not are of. Amen.