

Sermon: Open Your Eyes

Series: Finding Grace at the Intersections

Scripture: Psalm 32 and Luke 7:36-50

Date Used: October 23, 2022

Focus: Do we see with the eyes of God or with human eyes? Do we get caught up in what we see or try to see the world through the eyes of Christ?

I was reading a story the other day that reminded me of driver's education.... How many of you were required to take drivers education before you received your license?

The first thing my driver's education instructor did during my first driving lesson was to take me to a large parking lot. He parked at some distance away from any other cars and he opened the trunk of his car and pulled out several orange cones. He told me to get in the driver's seat, adjust the seat and then tell him when I was able to see his feet. At first, he stepped to the left of the driver's door and when I gave him the signal, he set down one of the orange cones he was holding. He then moved to the front of the car, then on the front passenger's side of the car and then he moved to the back of the car until I was able to see his feet and I gave him the signal to drop the cone. He continued to do this all the way around the car until he was at the left rear bumper. When he had dropped the last cone, he told me to get out of the car. As we walked around the car he said, "This is your blind spot. This is all the area you are unable to see when you are in the driver's seat."

I couldn't believe how large of an area this blind spot represented. It was huge. You could have fit another vehicle into some parts of it. I was shocked to discover how much I could not see when I was behind the wheel of a car.

One of the other lessons many of us learned in driver's education was this, "Always be careful at intersections. Bad things can happen at intersections."

I think God gives a similar message to us. We need to be aware of our blind spots and we need to pay attention at intersections. We need to pay attention to what could happen when our path intersects with the path of another person.... We need to be mindful that God may have something to do with that encounter. God may want our path to cross with that other person's path... And at that intersection of two people's lives, good things or bad things can happen.

I don't know about you, but in my life, I have come into contact with people, and I have just blazed right through the intersection. I just passed the person by, because I was too focused on myself or on my own agenda. Maybe you have managed those situations better than I have, or maybe like me, there are times you have been too busy or too distracted to notice anyone or anything. It's easy to do, too easy in fact. It's all too easy to become temporarily blind to what is going on around us.

There are also times we see things, but we struggle to see them from God's perspective. We get caught in a blind spot and lose track of what is most important to God.

Christian tradition holds that the most beneficial thing we can do in this life is to have a loving relationship with Christ. The best thing we can do with our lives is to be in a relationship with the living Christ, not the concept of Jesus, not the idea of Jesus, but the Christ who walks with us and speaks to us. In the Bible this relationship is summarized by the words of the greatest commandment to love the Lord our God with all our heart and soul and mind and strength; to love God with all that we are.

The second thing is to love our neighbors as we love ourselves. It is to learn to see others through the eyes of Christ; to remove the blind spots that block our view of people and see them just as Jesus would see them.

This requires that we work to remove all those things that obstruct our ability to see people just as Jesus sees them.

When we experience Christ's amazing grace, when we are growing in a personal relationship with him, we become more aware of Christ's grace for us, and we can begin to extend that grace toward others.

When we go through life living from this perspective, we are far more attentive to what is going on around us when we approach those intersections where our lives intersect with the lives of other people. When we have those moments when our lives intersect with the life of another, and we are aware that Christ is entering into that encounter with us, our view of the situation is much clearer. There are fewer things obstructing our vision.

I sometimes wonder how many good opportunities I've missed, how many good opportunities I have failed to recognize, things that Jesus planned for me to do as I've cruised through some of the intersections of my life. I am sure I've missed out on some of the good things Jesus wanted me to do. There have been occasions when I have been caught up in my own agenda, or whatever else is going on in my life at the moment, and I have missed opportunities to help write Christ's ongoing story.

Have you ever been so focused on yourself or something in your life that you didn't even notice the people your life was intersecting?

We're not the only ones with this problem.

Luke tells the story of Jesus' dinner with Simon the Pharisee. As Jesus and some others were gathered around the table in Simon's house this woman from the city of Bethany, this well-known sinner entered the house and placed herself at Jesus' feet. As Jesus was eating dinner, she wept and bathed his feet with her tears and wiped his feet with her hair. She then anointed Jesus' feet with this expensive ointment she had brought with her, and she kisses Jesus' feet.

As Simon watches this he says to himself, "If this guy was any kind of prophet, he would know what kind of woman this lady is!" Jesus can sense what Simon is thinking and he tells the story of two debtors, one that had a large debt the other with a much smaller debt. The debt of both men was cancelled by their creditor. Jesus then asked Simon, "Now which man do you think will love the creditor more?" Simon replied, "I suppose the fellow with the larger debt."

Luke writes that Jesus turned toward the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman?" ... "Do you really see this woman?" What Jesus is saying is, "Simon, are you aware of the intersection that God has brought you to? Do you have things that are blocking your vision that prevent you from really seeing this woman? Do you see this woman as God sees her and as I see her, or do the obstacles you have created in your mind, the biases you hold about this woman, prevented you from really seeing her?"

Jesus continues, "Look at what she has done."

- You're the host and you never even offered to wash my feet.
- She hasn't stopped bathing my feet with her tears and drying my feet with her hair.
- You're the host and you didn't anoint my head with oil.
- She has anointed my feet with ointment.

Simon, do you see this woman? Do you really see her... or do your culturally imposed blinders and other biases you hold keep you from really seeing her.

"By the way Simon. Her sins which are many have been forgiven."

Simon could see her sins, but I am afraid that is all he could see. He couldn't see how to make her part of God's story of redemption. He couldn't see how to make her part of God's story of life transformation.

Jesus sees the intersection for what it is. This intersection, this moment with this unnamed woman, is an opportunity to help write this woman into God's redemptive story. It is an opportunity for the lost to be found, a wayward child to come home to God. It's an opportunity for this unnamed woman to find her identity as a child of God.

What we often fail to see in this story is that it is also an opportunity for a pharisee named Simon to find his true identity as an agent of God's grace. come home to God.

As much as I want to blame Simon and claim I'm not like him, the evidence of my life shows the opposite to be true.

There are times a blind spot keeps me from seeing, really seeing the people that cross my path. Oh, I may see them. I may get a glimpse of them from my own biased perspective. But I don't see them as Jesus sees them.

I imagine I'm not alone in this.

At times we fail to see people because we are blinded by our issues, our own agendas, our own plans, and our own biases toward that person.

Eric Swanson, one of the leaders in the Externally Focused Church movement, writes about a boy he went to grade school with. Swanson writes, "His name was Joey, and nobody liked him. My friends and I didn't like him either. It was easy not to like him. He didn't fit in socially, and he was physically awkward. He was also pretty grubby looking. Joey didn't seem very bright, and he certainly wasn't athletic. He sat alone at lunch and stood by himself on the playground (at recess) We were fifth graders and just plain mean; somebody had to be the person that no one liked. (And) Joey was the easy target, and I jumped right in there with everyone else when it came time to pick on him. Most of the time, though, I just didn't see him."

Swanson continues, "Through my adult years during my visits back home, I have looked for Joey's name in the phone book to see if I could find him. I've asked friends if they know where he is.... On the other side of fifth grade, I recognize now that there were, more than likely, some things going on in Joey's life that contributed to the way he acted. I have tried to find him simply to say 'I'm sorry. I'm sorry I didn't see you. All I saw were things about you that made you easy to pick on.' I'd like to tell him about my story and I'd like to see Joey...really **see** him."

We, like Simon the pharisee, need new eyes for seeing. We need eyes that have been touched by the grace of God. We need eyes that have been transformed by the grace we ourselves have received. We need eyes that can recognize the people God puts at the crossroads in our lives for who they are!

Jesus wants us to see as he sees. Because he wants us to be His voice and to be a reflection of His heart. He wants us to extend his grace to others.

All day long, every day, we have the chance to live in grace and extend grace, allowing Christ's grace to be seen in and through our lives. Jesus invites us to see people - really see them - as their lives intersect with our lives. And he invites us to receive them with the same grace in which we ourselves have been received.