

Blinders

Menno Mennonite Church

April 6, 2025

Purpose: To explore the ways in which we can be shut off from what God is doing in our world

Message: Despite human nature to zero in on what we expect, we are invited beyond our blinders to see what God is doing.

Scripture: Luke 18:31-19:10 (As has been the case with some of the other selections from the Narrative lectionary, this cites several parable stories; in this case 3. We will likely split one of these off as a stand alone reading while keeping the sermon reading in our concentration for the sermon).

Synopsis: We each have our blind spots. Like the mirrors on our cars we are reminded that our situational awareness is not as perfect as we think it to be. This, though, is a hard-taught lesson, sometimes jerking us into awareness about we never suspected was there. Within these stories Jesus is offering new awareness to the ways that we can, at times, be blind to places where God is at work. How do we train ourselves to see beyond our assumptions and know all that God is doing?

Luke 18:31-42

³¹ Jesus took the Twelve aside and said,

“Look, we’re going up to Jerusalem,
and everything written about the Son of Man—the Human One
by the prophets will be accomplished.

³² He will be handed over to the Gentiles.
He will be ridiculed, mistreated, and spit on.

³³ After torturing him, they will kill him.

On the third day, he will rise up.”

³⁴ But the Twelve understood none of these words.

The meaning of this message was hidden from them
and they didn’t grasp what he was saying.

³⁵ As Jesus came to Jericho, a certain blind man
was sitting beside the road begging.

³⁶ When the man heard the crowd passing by,
he asked what was happening.

³⁷ They told him, “Jesus the Nazarene is passing by.”

³⁸ The blind man shouted, “Jesus, Son of David, show me mercy.”

³⁹ Those leading the procession scolded him,
telling him to be quiet, but he shouted even louder,
“Son of David, show me mercy.”

⁴⁰ Jesus stopped and called for the man to be brought to him.

When he was present Jesus asked,

⁴¹ “What do you want me to do for you?”

He said, “Lord, I want to see.”

⁴² Jesus said to him, “Receive your sight! Your faith has healed you.”

⁴³ At once he was able to see,
and he began to follow Jesus, praising God.
When all the people saw it, they praised God too.

There are some items of technology that are simply lost to history. Useful, everyday items that were solid, steady sellers could one day just sort of up and disappear. Think of the poor makers of once common products like white out. For the few of the younger generations with us today, it needs to be understood that once upon a time typing was a physical exercise as much as it was an occupational undertaking. Not only was touch-typing—working the keys without looking—a necessity for which one trained like a runner with long and regular exercise (I learned the art on a manual Olympic typewriter and a practice book from the 60's that had a thing for foxes). But when you made a mistake, the work really started. You had to roll out the paper that has been impact printed with your goof—and open a bottle of white out liquid paper to paint over what went wrong. The time was that every desk had at least a bottle or two. Imagine the excitement when you found a typewriter that actually had an erase key. Now I get to talk to you like it is a museum piece, because at least partially it is. Whiteout just dried up and disappeared.

This is far from an isolated phenomenon. I am sure we all would have our list of those things that have simply slide into history, quietly or not. Blinders are one of those things. We all know what they are, at least in principle. There isn't a whole lot of nuance in the name after all it says what it does and that is about it. My familiarity is a bit more personal given that I have known my fair share of folks for whom a horse is a daily driver, not an expensive hobby. There is a lot of utility in a blinder it turns out. Horses have almost 350 degrees of vision, giving them a fairly remarkable sense of the world. But only what is straightforward 65 or so degrees functions in binocular vision, giving them the sense of the 3rd dimension of what's going on around them. That's why they are so given to seeing things with a far grander scale than we, and suffering for it. Blinders it turns out serve a fairly specific and functional purpose when you get down to it; limiting the vision to that which is critical to the job at hand and the world as they see it. As often as we are given to thinking of blinders as relics of history, lingering in the past without relevance save as a illustrative cliché for being able to see more than what we had, something to be removed, there is more here than what we might think. Not only are these still a thing, but a very important thing at that.

It is blinders that link these stories together, really. Each of these stories speak to a way of seeing and knowing that has their own breadth and dimension. But each of them speak out with their own unique shortsightedness and limitation, one on top of the other. Per usual, reading the

Bible as we do, one nugget and story at a time, these connections are not always all that clear or easily seen that they might link up like this. We might even struggle to place these stories in proximity to each other given 1) we are not inclined to go to Luke for our story telling prowess save Christmas and 2) the stories stand alone with their own morals and connections in our world, and most of it does not have to do with sightedness or lack thereof. But there is the connection all the same.

The first blinding of vision comes with the disciples attempting to reconcile the message that they were been given from Jesus: that the Messiah was intended, always, to die, and to be raised within the power of God. I the revolutionary and confounding nature of this cannot be understated I think. The messianic promise that they understood Jesus to fulfill laid at the very center of what it meant to be part of the nation of Israel, let alone a Jew. This was the one on who all things were centered and focused where God's liberation would be made known. These things were not just new or innovative but were completely out of character, somewhat like if, say, Santa Claus started preferring to wear neon green and develop a liking for turnips being left for him to snack on. It simply didn't make sense because it is was not what they were expecting.

In the story of the blind man at the side of the road, you have the obvious yes, and that is not to be ignored. But there is a lot more going on here too. You have the focus of the disciples and the crowds pushing the man into silence rather than seeing need with mercy as Jesus did. As with the children who were deemed too unimportant to be brought to the master, so too were the needs on the one being tried to be buried by the demands of the many. They were unwilling to see the presence of need as something that needed attention and were all too willing to continue with the world as they and we have always known with: with some persons being well outside of vision and appreciation at all.

The third story here which you, actually heard first as I asked Emily to take up that part prior separately is the story of Zaccheus. Here too was a member of the disposable and disregarded class being seen and known in a new way. He wants to see Jesus and is seen in return in ways that I am guess he could barely even anticipate. Zacheus has accepted his lot already as the despised and the rejected. It seems he is well accustomed to the role on the outside looking in. Even there, Jesus sees him and calls to him bringing new life and new reality to him. His assumptions about the world were challenged when he bumps into Jesus and is

brought to change and salvation in ways that are far more revolutionary than just seeing and knowing whose we are. Each one of these groups and individuals came to Jesus looking for something—a glimpse of that which they longed to see. That is what they got, to be sure, but that is also what changed them each as their needs collide with the one who sees them and knows them not just as they are thought to be, either by themselves or by the world as they know and the expectations it carries.

These stories are of blind spots; each one different; each one of a different source, but all with the same response: that it yielded expectations that were time and again confounded by the actual reality when Jesus entered the mix. We all have our blind spots; we all carry our assumptions. Some of the most durable being about ourselves. The things that we believe about who we are, what we are capable of and our role in the world are often the most demanding and damaging pieces of our personal psyche. We internalize that which we think we are; that which we have accepted is our role, our lot in life. It can be startling to have Jesus enter even here and challenge the ways we can sometimes understand and know ourselves and live out in our world. We need to be aware of our blind spots—the places that we struggle to see in order to be part of what Jesus is about in our world.

But that is not the only sort of blindness that can confound us. Sometimes, we find ourselves surrounded by way too much to take it all in at once. We might be taken with the enormity of the moment. The perch that we hold where we have whole swathes of the world before us, with all the varied and concerning patterns to go with it, it can be hard to know where to place our focus, hard to know where we are to be or exist. It can be easy to be spooked by the scary things that we see on a regular basis about our world and the ways that it functions and fails to function both at the same time. Just as there is a problem when our sight is limited, there can also be a problem when our attentions become so distracted that we don't know where our attentions ought to lay and where to best hold ourselves within some of the chaos.

A sermon title like *Blinders* would likely have a somewhat predictable conclusion really: Find the places that you are blind to that which is Christ, and remove your blinders that you may see. Remove the blinders of sin that can confuse and mislead. Remove the blinders of supposition that you might be surprised even within the predictability of our steadying faith. Remove the blinders that you might see all that you must to be the people that God is calling you to be. And that is absolutely a good message so far as it goes. We have our blind spots; we do

well to remember that not everything that we see within the mirrors are as they really are or how they appear.

But there is also something to be said to remember what blinders are actually used for: to fix focus, remove distractions that can spoke and scare. To give a focus to the road ahead and the world as it needs to be. Blinders remove the breadth of concern and permits focus on that which actually matters: the way of that we are being led.

So I want to offer an amended conclusion to this sermon. Consider your blinders. Consider your focueses. Where are they directed? How do they point you to that which is the kingdom in the world? How do they interfere with your expectations of God and what God is doing in Christ Jesus. Consider, perhaps, that your blinders may have you looking the wrong way to find your salvation. Your blinders may be too wide and too comprehensive for the moment, and it doesn't allow you to focus where you should. Perhaps this is a moment where we are better served by adjusting our blinders as well as simply removing them. We know that the one who matter is the one who has always matters: the Christ who doesn't promise ease or lack of challenge, but that even were we might be afraid, there too he will be.

Our blinders need to allow us to focus on Christ; not the Christ of our expectations, but the Christ who sees us for just as we are and loves us all the same. May we meet this Christ in new ways, always. Amen.