

St Paul's Ev. Lutheran Church – Muskego, WI

Sermon for March 31, 2019

Text: Luke 22:54-62

His Pain—Our Gain: Honesty

Blindspot. The word takes me back to driver's ed, where, it seems, the common instructional methodology is embedding terror in the heart of the prospective driver. As if I wasn't nervous enough behind the wheel, the instructor would bark out: "Hands 10 and 2! Too fast! Too slow! Uh-oh! You didn't check your blind spot! Crash! Bang! You're dead!"

Did you know that we are born with a blind spot? All around the back of the inside of our eyes are photoreceptors—nerve cells that interpret light and transmit the information to the brain. That's how we see. There are no photoreceptors at the spot where the optic nerve is attached to the retina. It's a blind spot.

So, why don't we notice this blind spot? This is fascinating! Our brain assesses our surroundings, estimates what could be in the missing spot, and projects it in place of the blank space. We are truly fearfully and wonderfully made!

But here's the thing. What the brain chooses to fill in to the blind spot, isn't always what's really there. Here's a typical test to discover your blind spot. You put your hand over your left eye, focus your right eye on the plus sign and move in and out until the yellow circle disappears. That's your blind spot. What will you see instead of a yellow circle? A red circle. We can understand why the brain assumes that a red circle is there. The problem? It's not there. Our brain is lying to us!



We also talk about blind spots in our lives. Realities about ourselves we don't see or illusions we think are true about ourselves, but they are not. Like Peter in our scripture lesson, in line with the very definition of blind spots, all too often we cannot see them or recognize how dangerous they are.

Luke 22:54-62

54 Then seizing him, they led him away and took him into the house of the high priest. Peter followed at a distance. 55 And when some there had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and had sat down together, Peter sat down with them. 56 A servant girl saw him seated there in the firelight. She looked closely at him and said, "This man was with him."

57 But he denied it. "Woman, I don't know him," he said.

58 A little later someone else saw him and said, "You also are one of them." "Man, I am not!" Peter replied.

59 About an hour later another asserted, "Certainly this fellow was with him, for he is a Galilean."

60 Peter replied, "Man, I don't know what you're talking about!" Just as he was speaking, the rooster crowed.

61 The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word the Lord had spoken to him: "Before the rooster crows today, you will disown me three times." 62 And he went outside and wept bitterly.

Peter, a mirror to our spiritual schizophrenia.

Even been tempted to think, “Really, Peter? All your brave talk and you flat out deny Jesus—three times even! Really Peter? Jesus told you it was going to happen. You couldn’t see and stop it?” Lurking in the back of our minds is the thought, “If this were me, man, it would have turned out differently.” Blind spot alert!

This isn’t the first time we witness incongruity in Peter’s words and actions. Remember the time Jesus asked the disciples about what the crowds thought about him? (Matthew 16:14-16). “Some say you’re Elijah; others, John the Baptist.” Then Jesus asked, “**But who do you say I am.**” Remember what Peter said? “**You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.**” Wow, Peter! Way to go! Spiritual hero award of the day.

A short time later, however, when Jesus said that he must suffer and die, Peter chastised Jesus: “**Lord, may this never happen to you!**” (Matthew 16:22). How does Peter, spiritual hero, so quickly become, Peter, spiritual zero?

Actually, Peter’s inconsistency shouldn’t surprise us. Peter, child of God, enlightened by the Holy Spirit, also has a dark side, a sinful nature, that’s not only blind to God’s loving plan of salvation, but outright hostile to it. Do you hear what I’m saying? We don’t know what we don’t know. Oftentimes, spiritual ignorance becomes the cause of our blind spot.

What might this look like in our own lives? We may find ourselves feeling overwhelmed and think, “What’s God doing? I’m his child. He’s supposed to watch over me, protect me, keep the struggle away.” The idea, however, that God would never allow his children to suffer is our thinking, not his. We’re focusing on only part of what God’s Word says, “I watch over and protect you,” and blind to: “**In this world you will have trouble**” (John 16:33). We haven’t allowed God’s Word to enlighten and transform our hearts and minds (Romans 12:12).

Other examples? A Christian couple living together before making the commitment of marriage. To them this seems like a perfectly reasonable thing to do. They are listening to the world, to each other and not listening to God. It’s a blind spot. The same could be said of the Christian LGBTQ individual we talked about in our last sermon series. Or the father who is convinced that working and bringing in money is more important than the spiritual and emotional needs of his family. You don’t know what you don’t know. That’s why it’s called a blind spot. Another powerful reason to be in the Word every day and to surround ourselves with God-fearing people who love us enough to be honest with us and point out our blind spots. How open are you to these kinds of conversations?

Peter helps us see another common spiritual pitfall—a lack of self-understanding. “**Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death**” (Luke 22:33). “**Even if all fall away, I never will**” (Matthew 26:33). Peter’s misplaced self-confidence sets the stage for what is to come.

Peter needs to learn the lesson every Christian needs to learn: never say never. Do we believe that there are sins that we could never be tempted to commit? If we do, we do not comprehend the power of the sinful nature living inside of us. Consider Cain and Abel. Brothers with God-fearing parents living in a big bright beautiful world. What did they lack? Nothing! If you were writing their life-story, would you ever have imagined it ending with one brother murdering the other? Our struggle to understand this betrays our inability to truly comprehend the depravity of our sinful nature. Paul wrestled with this in Romans, chapter 7. “**The good I want to do it do not do. And the evil I don’t want to do, this I keep on doing!**”

The white supremacist in New Zealand who opened fire in two mosques and killed 50 people was once a little boy riding a tricycle up and down his driveway. Who would have imagined? When the alcoholic took his

first drink, did he have any inkling of the path he would one day take? As the happy bride and groom walk down from the altar arm in arm, they have no idea of the deep heartache they will cause each other before they part ways. If Peter teaches us anything, it's that that could be any of us. The dark seed of murder, addiction, adultery and every other ugly sin finds a home inside each of our hearts. If we don't see that, if we won't admit it, we're in even greater danger of becoming what we never thought we could.

Peter, a roadmap to our spiritual demise.

“Even if all fall away, I never will” (Matthew 26:33). Blind to the power of his sinful nature, Peter played right into Satan's hands. Jesus foretold Peter's denial. Had Peter taken Jesus' prediction to heart, if he understood his weakness, don't you think he would have thought twice about following Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest? If you're trying to remain sober, and you know the power of your sinful nature, do you hang out with people who love to drink? If you're having marriage troubles, and you recognize how weak you are, do you talk about your woes day after day with a coworker who is also having troubles in his/her marriage? Way too often we cozy up to the fire of temptation like Peter cozying up to Jesus' enemies because we're blind to the danger we're walking into.

And you better believe Satan is going to be there paving the way. If we look at the parallel account of Peter's denial in the Gospel of John, we see how Satan greases the skids for Peter's denials. The lady at the gate says, “You're not one of Jesus' disciples, right? She's expecting him to say that he's not. She's almost begging him to say it. And once he does how easy to say it again. She's the friend who says “one little high, what can it hurt”; the coworker who says “just take it, you deserve it;” the people who tell you to “get out of your marriage because God wants you to be happy.”

The frustrating this is, once we're on the path, we choose to do things that just keep us moving down our self-destructive path. Only we can't see it. Like the husband who gets angry with his wife because she's always running late. Every time he blows up, verbally attacking her, thinking that will induce her to change. Then she becomes upset, gets defensive, blame it on him. He doesn't help get the kids ready, etc., etc. Insert your own destructive cycle here. We get stuck, doing the same dumb thing over and over again. Why! Sin makes us stupid! Blind? We can't see where and how **WE** are the problem! Suddenly, Paul's words sound incredibly appropriate: ***“Who will rescue me from this body of death?”*** (Romans 7:24).

Peter, a testimony to God's unending grace.

Not us. If we think that somehow we can, we're suffering from yet another blind spot. You see, this chapter of Peter's story, like every other chapter of Peter's story, is not about Peter. It's about Jesus. It's about God's love and grace. It's about God's desire to help and save us from ourselves. Think about all Jesus did for two-faced Peter.

Jesus lovingly warned Peter about his denial, showing him exactly what was in his blind spot. And he has done the same thing for every other two-faced Peter in this room. We call them the 10 commandments. And for those of us who may be a little slow on the pick-up, he's also filled Scripture with countless real-life examples of the weaknesses and failings that are common to us all.

And where is Jesus while Peter is in the courtyard swearing up and down that he doesn't know him? Jesus is on his way to the cross where he will suffer and die to pay sin's price. What does this mean? Every time we fall, the guilt and fear we carry because of the disappointment and anger we imagine God feels—it's not real. The guilt and the share are, but NOT God's disappointment and anger. What does the Scripture say? In Christ all sin is forgiven, removed from us as far as the east is from the west, buried at the bottom of the sea.

Not only is God not stewing on it. He tells us it's forgotten it. God give us the power to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is his love for us in Christ!

There's more! After he foretold Peter's denial, Jesus quickly added: ***"Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift all of you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail"*** (Luke 22:31,32). A powerful expression of Jesus' unconditional love for Peter! Psalm 139 reminds us that God knows everything about us. No sin we commit will ever take God by surprise. Jesus is saying: "Peter, I know you're going to fall. But Peter, through it all, my love for you will NOT change!" God says the same thing to you and me in our Baptisms, in his Supper, every time we gather here to confess our sin and receive his healing words of absolution!

Finally, even though, humanly speaking, Jesus was controlled by the high priest's guard, when the rooster crowed and Peter's bitter moment of realization came, Jesus made sure that his face was the first thing Peter saw. And what did Peter see when he looked into Jesus's eyes? He saw love and compassion—a love and compassion Peter knew he didn't deserve. That's why he went out and wept bitterly. But the love in Jesus' eyes sparked a hope that kept Peter's faith alive and eventually fanned his floundering faith flame into the raging fire we see as Peter boldly proclaims Christ on Pentecost Sunday and to his last dying breath.

This is the power God's gospel love exerts in our hearts. Imagine for a moment that I'm the high school senior who goes out drinking and ends up totaling the family car. If I don't understand God's gospel love, if God's grace is in my blind spot, I'm thinking to myself: "I messed up. My Father is going to kill me!" The last thing I'll want to do is face my dad. But if I can see, can at least partially comprehend the fullness of God's love and grace, my thinking is very different: "I messed up. I better call Dad." I yearn for his loving embrace.

Peter's denial of our Lord and Savior gives us a deeper understanding of our blind spots and how dangerous they are. I hope that from now on when we read or hear of Peter's denial instead of saying, "Really, Peter?", I hope we're saying, "Peter, we really have way too much in common."

But there's an even more important lesson for us to take home today. Of all our blind spots the most dangerous is our natural expectation of judgment from God and our struggle to accept his love and mercy. As we realize more and more how corrupt and depraved our sinful nature really is, God help us to not turn our faces away in disgrace, but to focus our gaze on the cross. God help us, as he did with Peter, look past our guilt and shame and see our Savior's face. Amen.

Prepared by Pastor Jeffrey A. Bonack

jbbonack@stpaulmuskego.org

414-422-0320 ext. 119