

Blind Spots
March 15, 2026

John 9:1-41

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A few of us were having a conversation this week about our first memories of Jesus. Those present had all grown up in the church, so it was hard for us to pick out a distinct earliest memory. We don't remember being told about him for the first time because he was always there. We didn't so much consciously learn about him, as we unconsciously absorbed him. Generally, our more distinct memories of Jesus came later when we learned something new and surprising about him, when we saw him in a totally different way. It was like we could see, for the first time, something that had been there all along. And so it is with so many concepts throughout our lives. There's the saying: A frog asks a fish how they like the water and the fish replies, "What's water?" We could go our whole lives being blind to what's all around us! To be able to see for the first time is to know that previously we had been blind. And the truth is, no matter how many times we learn new things, no matter how many times our eyes are opened, we all still have blind spots. And it's not always easy to learn new things, accept new facts, open our eyes wide. We may at first feel like a fish out of water.

The people in our gospel story today have a question about the blind man. But their question isn't, "Why is he blind?" They take for granted that someone's sin caused this blindness; they cannot fathom that it would have happened for any other reason. They just don't know whose sin it was. They are blind to a possibility beyond their narrow understanding. So, it is a radical thing for Jesus to say, "This doesn't have anything to do with sin. This is an opportunity for God's works to be revealed." I wonder how much this rocks the people's world. They learn something new that does not affirm their long-held assumptions, does not fit into their worldview, it's not the story they have always been told. And they still aren't ready to consider this new information by the end of today's story.

As we read John's gospel and approach Holy Week, I'm reminded of a story I was told when I was young, and then what I began to learn about that narrative later in my life. I must have been in later elementary school when another church family was at our house for dinner. Sitting around our dining room table, our parents were talking about their understanding of God, when one of the other parents explained to me with an authority I didn't question, that the Old Testament God was wrathful and the New Testament God was loving. Perhaps you were told something similar at some point; it's a common assumption. And it made sense to me (simple binaries are a lot easier to accept than ambiguity). I lived and attended school in a small town with very little diversity, and I didn't know any Jewish people well enough to wonder why, if what I learned was true, contemporary Jewish people were not wrathful like their "Old Testament" God. But what I learned was reinforced by other words and impressions I absorbed in my Christian community over the years. I absorbed that all

the Pharisees were Jesus' main antagonists and "the Jews" played a significant role in Jesus' death. I didn't grow up with an appreciation for Jesus' Jewish identity. You may remember one children's message here when there was visible and audible shock when I told them that Jesus was Jewish.

Later I learned more historical and cultural context about our scripture and the places where what the gospel writers recorded didn't add up. And I will be honest with you, when I learned that some of our core narratives, like the Passion story we read on Good Friday, did not reflect what would have actually happened historically, I thought I was losing my faith. I wonder if you have had an experience, whether it was about scripture, society, or even people you know. It can be scary to consider new information that challenges our worldview and familiar assumptions. It can be scary just to consider that we may have blind spots at all. It can leave us feeling unmoored, insecure, maybe even guilty.

Like the assumption that blindness must be caused by sin, don't we still, as a society, often assume individual failings when it comes to things like homelessness, drug addiction, or racial disparities, rather than consider systemic failings that we might contribute to or benefit from? If we are not the victims of such inequalities, we are often blind to them. And they can be the simplest, seemingly innocuous things. In her piece, [White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack](#), Peggy McIntosh notes that one of the things white people can unconsciously assume, is that they can go to any pharmacy and find band-aids in their skin tone. And they can be the most tragic and deadliest things. Unconsciously perpetuating anti-Jewish rhetoric in our sacred text has led to devastating synagogue shootings by people who have left manifestos based on Christian scripture, as was the case in the Tree of Life Synagogue massacre in 2018 and the Poway synagogue shooting in 2019.

But Jesus does not say that classist, racial, or ethnic blindness is a sin. Ignorance is not a sin. Becoming aware of it is an opportunity to participate in God's work of communal liberation and healing. The issue is when we don't take that opportunity. In the New Revised Standard Vision, unlike the version we just heard by Steve Garnaas-Holmes, Jesus says to the people, "If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, 'We see,' your sin remains." It can be uncomfortable to admit that we don't know what we don't know. It can be tempting to keep our blinders on even once we become aware of them. To insist the narrative we have always known, the one we have grown comfortable with, is the whole truth. Instead, let's remember that there is grace when we dare to take off our blinders, when we have the courage to consider something new, different, unsettling. The first step toward wholeness and salvation is admitting our blindness. To paraphrase Jesus' words, "If you admit your blindness, you can begin the work of addressing your unconscious contribution to the world's sin. As long as you insist that you can see, that you already know everything, your contribution to sinful ways will continue."

It is never too late to take off our blinders, even if part of us has been aware of them for a long time. There is grace. Definitely from God, hopefully from our communities and ourselves. And the truth is, after we become aware of our blind spots and are courageous enough to address them, there will come a day when we become aware of new blind spots.

The more humble we become, the easier it will be to recognize those new blind spots, and the better we will become at contributing to communal liberation rather than systemic sin. The Pharisees and people in today's gospel reading spend a lot of energy trying to find an explanation for this miracle that will fit into their preconceived notions. They would rather contort or discard the inconvenient truths than accept something new. But at the end there is hope. There is a tentative question right after a stubborn statement. There is a baby step toward liberation that we might find inspiring. "Surely we are not blind...are we?"