

In a torrential rainstorm, we were driving around the north end of St. Louis on I-270, headed west toward Kansas. Our vehicle was a borrowed mini-van.

As always on that highway, traffic was heavy—all 6 lanes of it.

With the rain and the spray from hundreds of spinning tires all around us, visibility was lousy.

In my lane, the cars ahead of me stretched in a solid line bumper to bumper, and the line was moving ever more slowly.

Suddenly, to my left, I saw an open space into a lane where things were moving more quickly. I checked my rear view mirror. I checked my side mirror. Nothing there. So I steered left into the empty space.

Except that it wasn't empty.

The blast of a driver's horn right beside my left ear let me know that I had made a serious mistake.

The minivan I was driving was a new vehicle for me. I didn't know where the blind spot was.

I hadn't actually moved left very far into the path of the other car, so instinctively I jerked my steering wheel to the right in order to go back where I came from.

When I did that, something happened.

If you have remembered the fact that this incident occurred during a driving rainstorm, you might be able to guess what happened.

Nothing. That's what happened. Absolutely nothing.

When I turned my wheels back to the right, I began to hydroplane.

There's no more helpless feeling in the world.

You can't steer, because your tires are not in contact with the road, but they're skidding over the water like four slippery water skis.

Somehow I knew what to do next. Nothing.

I resisted the impulse to slam on my brakes.

I held the steering wheel straight and didn't turn it, and I took my foot off the gas pedal.

And though it felt like a lifetime,
a couple seconds later my tires found the road again.
And thankfully the guy to my left was able to avoid me as I fought for control.
I thought I could see, but I had a blind spot, and I almost caused a serious accident.

We are never in more danger than when we THINK we can see,
but we're actually blind.

That's the point of John 9, the story of the healing of the blind man.
It's really a story aimed at the Pharisees,
who could see so well, whose theology was so correct,
whose lifestyle was so pure, but who had a huge blind spot—
their own self-righteousness.

Few people are as blind as the blind man in the story.
Most of us can actually see quite well.

But the blind man had the advantage of knowing he was blind.
The Pharisees, like us, had excellent eyesight—
so good that they assumed they saw it all;
they assumed they could see perfectly.

It helps to remember that when God created our physical eyes,
God created them with a blind spot.
Your eye is like a camera,
and in the front of your eye is the lens,
and the back of your eye is like the film that the light falls upon.
All over the back of your eye are little light receptors
that receive the particular bit of light sent to them by the lens.

But there's one spot, one location where there are no light receptors.
It's where the optic nerve is located,
the nerve that sends the pictures to the brain.
Right at that spot you are blind. It's not a big area, but it's there.
So in our physical bodies there is a constant reminder that we are limited,
that we cannot see like God sees,
that our vision has holes in it,
that none of us can claim to see all things with perfect & complete clarity.

And yet often we act as if we have no blind spots.

We see so much and we see it so well that we think we can see it all.
We fight with one another because each of us thinks,
“I can see, and they are blind.”

We forget that the Apostle Paul said that we see only through a glass darkly.
We forget what Jesus said about focusing so much on the mote in your
brother’s eye that you can’t see the log in your own eye.

You know, that’s why we try to pretend that we have no blind spots.
It’s scary to admit an area of blindness.
It’s scary to find a log in your own eye.
It’s scary to face the holes in our vision.

Some time ago I read an article entitled “*Spiritual Incest.*”
It described our human tendency to speak only with those who
already agree with us, our habit of having contact only with those
who are already on our side.

We don’t WANT to know the other side.
We don’t WANT to see into that blind spot.
We don’t WANT to have our faith challenged.
We don’t WANT to have our beliefs or ideas or prejudices questioned.
We KNOW where we want to go, just like I knew where I wanted to go in that van
when I tried to change lanes.

That’s why liberals tend to talk only to other liberals
and conservatives tend to talk only to other conservatives.
It’s why Mennonites tend to talk mostly to other Mennonites,
and Lutherans tend to talk mostly to Lutherans.
In the church, no matter what the issue, we tend to talk with those who already agree
with us rather than seeking out those with whom we think we may disagree.

But when we communicate only with those who have the same blind spots that we do,
all we do is expand our blind spot, because we’re talking only with people
who have the SAME blind spot.
We become more and more certain that WE are right
and that THEY are wrong,
and we mistake certainty for truth.

When we speak only with those who already agree with us,
we gain no new insight, we see nothing new,
and we reinforce each other's blindness,

All conflicts, whether it's nations fighting or communities fighting
or churches fighting or families fighting,
are perpetuated by people who are SURE that they can see,
and are SURE the other side is blind.

Until parties on both sides can dare to check out their own blind spots,
the wars and conflicts will continue.

Healing comes only when blindness is admitted—
not the other side's blindness, but YOUR blindness, MY blindness.

But again, there's something within each of us that does not WANT to see
into that blind spot.

We're a little like the teenage girl whose car needed a tune-up,
so her father drove her car to the garage.

The father very rarely drove his daughter's car, so when he sat in the
driver's seat and looked around to adjust the side mirrors,
he was shocked by what he saw in the mirrors.

Actually, he was shocked by what the DIDN'T see.

When he looked in the two side mirrors of his daughter's car,
he could see nothing behind the car.

The only thing he could see in those mirrors was . . . himself.
They were not aimed so that the driver could see the traffic;
they were aimed back at the driver.

When he got back home, he accosted his daughter and said,
"Young lady, what are you thinking of?"

She said, "Oh, Daddy, I can always turn around and see the cars behind me,
but what I want to see is me!" Well, after that they had a long talk.

We're all like that daughter. We're all self-centered.
We all think we're right and the other side is wrong.
We all would rather not face our areas of blindness.

I'm a Mennonite pastor. I've been a Mennonite all my life,
and I anticipate I'll be a Mennonite until my death.

And because I have some theological training,
I can point out the blind spots of the other Christian denominations.
I can tell you where I think they're weak, or confused, or just plain wrong.

But we Mennonites have blind spots, too. We have as many blind spots
as the Lutherans, the Catholics, the Baptists, and all the others do.

Praise God that salvation does not depend on the absence of blind spots!

For instance, we Mennonites are humbly proud that we baptize only people
who have made adult commitments to Christ.
We're sure that we see, we're sure that WE are interpreting the Bible correctly,
and we're sure that those who baptize babies have a blind spot.

But we are blind to our tendency to trust in our own good works.
We're so big into commitment that we sometimes ignore God's grace.
We think baptism is something WE do, not something GOD does.
Churches on BOTH sides of this issue have blind spots;
we need each other to see the truth.

Another example: for almost 500 years we've been a peace church;
we urge our young people to be conscientious objectors to war.

But we're blind to the wars we declare on one another,
the gossiping, the snide remarks, the exclusion, the refusal to forgive.
We build walls between ourselves and the folks who take a different position;
we huddle comfortably with those on our side who
agree with us, and we call it peace.

Jesus is the healer of blindness.

Jesus can give us the courage to admit our blind spots.

Jesus can help us talk to people who disagree with us.

Jesus can lead us to encounter those who can shed light
on our areas of darkness.

Jesus can take away the fear of looking at anything besides ourselves.

Jesus can open our eyes and help us to see.

But that happens only when we admit that we CAN'T see,
only when we say, "God, I think I've got some blind spots"
only when we say to our sister, our brother, our neighbor,
"Help me see this situation from YOUR point of view.
Help me adjust my mirrors."

If you don't check out your blind spots,
you'll be prone to the kind of disaster that almost happened to me
as I drove through that rainstorm in St. Louis.

If you don't ask Jesus to help you see in new ways,
you'll miss part of the picture,
you won't see the danger,
you'll miss the opportunity,
and you'll cheat yourself of new growth, new perspectives, new truth.

Admit that your vision has holes in it.
Let Jesus adjust your mirrors.
Ask Jesus to give you the courage to see into your blind spots.
Pay attention to what others can see where your vision is obstructed.
Let Jesus heal your blindness.