

1 Samuel 16:1-13
Ephesians 5:8-14
John 9:1-41
Psalm 23

When I learned to drive my dad taught me about checking my blind spots. It doesn't come naturally – someone has to teach us. He also taught me how to drive with a trailer. The first time we did it, I had to back the trailer before I could head out on the road. Thinking like a young driver – this will be no problem – jumped in behind the wheel and was surprised that I couldn't see behind me because of the trailer. Dad said the trailer makes for one big blind spot. I then asked, "How do I back up if I can't see?!" He said it starts before getting behind the wheel. I got out of the drivers seat and followed him behind the trailer. He showed me how to count the fence posts and then, when I got to a particular post, I knew I had backed up far enough (and if I continued, I'd hit something). I climbed back into the driver's seat, put it in reverse and then said, "If I miss counted, how do I know if I've got back too far?" He replied, "When you hear the crunching sound."

Although Jesus never had to be taught how to back up driving with a trailer, he did know about spiritual blind spots. From what I've read, Jewish spirituality in the 1st century addressed spiritual blind spots – biases, assumptions, ignorance, sin – that can hold us back from growing in faith. In today's Gospel lesson, Jesus opens the eyes of a man born blind and, at the same time, addresses the blind spots that the religious leaders have.

In order to check your spiritual blind spots, one first must have a humble heart. It takes humility to recognize that you have a spiritual blind spot. Without humility, it's like backing a trailer and waiting to hear the crunch sound that you've hit something. Maybe you'll get lucky and not hit anything; but, the humble driver will get out and look to see first where to back the trailer. That's how we are to address our spiritual life. We have to be willing to get out of the driver's seat and take a look around – at places we can't see when we're behind the wheel.

With a humble heart, Jewish spirituality suggests that Scripture will point out our blind spots. Scripture will be our teacher and guide. For instance, when God says: this is what I require, to do good, seek justice and walk humbly with your God, the believer with a humble heart will ask if we are doing good and seeking justice. Are we walking with God or are we in a hurry sitting in the driver's seat. Scripture says we are to love God with all our heart, our mind, soul and strength. It's a way of checking our blind spots – have we been loving God the best we can, or have we been following the devices and desires of our hearts?

Another way to see our blind spots is to ask God directly to show us what we are missing. Traditionally, psalm 139 is used as a prayer to God to show us our blind spots. Psalm 139, verse one: *Lord, you have searched me out and known me. You know my sitting down and my rising up.*

What a beautiful reminder – God knows us, inside and out. God knows when we are sitting, when we are standing; God searches us and knows us from afar (which I think means we don't have to be in a high holy place, like near the tabernacle, but just sitting in our home).

Now, here's the prayer. It is verse 22 and 23.

Search me out, O God, and know my heart. Try me and know my restless thoughts. Look well whether there be any wickedness in me and lead me into the way that is everlasting.

It's an invitation for God to search and to tell us what we're missing – where our blind spots are.

Do you remember the story when the rich young man comes up to Jesus and asks, "How do I inherit eternal life?" Jesus said, "What does the law say?" The man replies: Love God and love your neighbor. Jesus said, "You are right, but, there is one thing you are missing – sell your belongings and follow me." The man knew the law and could recite it well. But, he had a blind spot – his possessions. We can consider that his possessions were actually possessing him. It was his blind spot. Jesus told him how to address it.

There was a day that I prayed the discernment prayer in Psalm 139. Later on, I read a Gospel story about the Pharisees. Suddenly I had the awareness of a blind spot – I was like the Pharisees. I had learned a lot, I committed my life to studying and devotion and sharing the Good News. That is good. So did the Pharisees. What I shared with them is that knowledge can become a stumbling block to trusting in God's grace and all the things that we cannot see. Wisdom has a blind spot – I can fall into the trap of thinking that I know better than others, especially those who have not studied Scripture. Or go to church. Or have a prayer life. Knowing Scripture and the Church can lead to a blind spot where I think I know how everyone else should live. ... just like the Pharisees. Thus, I am a Pharisee. I can see myself, under the right circumstances, saying the things that they said.

In today's passage, they were upset that Jesus healed a man born blind on the sabbath. Healing is considered work and one is not supposed to do any work on the sabbath. They were doing their best in following the law that they had studied. And, frankly, they were correct, legally speaking. Suddenly, for the first time in my life, I had compassion on the Pharisees. I could see that I could have the same blind spots they had. A miracle happened – man could see. But, they were blind; they couldn't see beyond their own reading of Scripture. I believe there were Pharisees that had humble hearts who could see what was happening; but, the ones that made it into the Gospel had a hardened heart. ... and it caused a blind spot.

At our yearly Ash Wednesday service, something happens when I pray the Litany of Repentance. I feel refreshed and happy. That might sound counter to praying the Litany but it's like having my blind spots revealed and then making a successful lane change without causing an accident. Here is a section of the Litany:

We confess to you, Lord, all our past unfaithfulness, the pride, the hypocrisy, the impatience of our lives.

If you want to talk about what a spiritual blind spot looks like, it's unfaithfulness. It is pride. It is hypocrisy. It is impatience. I have been unfaithful to God. I have pride. I have fallen into hypocrisy. And I don't think I'm alone in saying this. I can be impatient from time to time. Did you know it's a spiritual blindness to be impatient?

The Litany continues:

Our self-indulgent appetites and ways and our exploitation of other people.

Our anger at our own frustration. Our envy of those more fortunate than ourselves.

Our intemperate love of worldly goods and comforts and our dishonesty in daily life and work.

Our negligence in prayer and worship and our failure to commend the faith that is in us.

Self-indulgent appetite = Blind spot. Anger at our own frustration = Blind spot. Yep, I'm guilty of that. Here are more blind spots: envy of those with more fortune than ourselves, our intemperate love of worldly goods and comforts, our dishonesty in daily life and work, our negligence in prayer and worship, and our failure to commend the faith that is in us.

Here's the good news: God doesn't leave us with these blind spots. God knows. You know my thoughts from afar. You know my rising up. You know my sitting down. You know who I am – blind spots and all. God knows all of this about me and about you. And God loves us anyway.

Talk about spiritual blind spots; the prophet Samuel shows up at the house of Jesse to find the new king of Israel. He sees the oldest born who's also the tallest. And the prophet Samuel says, "Well, there he is. Here's the new king of..." and then the Spirit says, "No, not him." Because God looks at things differently than you see him. Samuel had a blind spot. Okay. Must be the second born. No. Okay. Must be the third born. No. How many sons do you have, Samuel said to Jesse. There was one more. He's the youngest, out tending the sheep. He's playing on the harp. He's making poetry. That one. That one's going to be the king of Israel. And Samuel said, "Bring him here." And he shows up. And that's when the spirit says, "This is the king." This is the one who will unite the tribes of Israel. This is the one who will build the temple. This is the one who will dance and sing in front of the ark of the covenant. This one was in the spiritually blind spot to all of them. Yet David was anointed.

God sees it differently than we do. God loves us differently than we see ourselves. God goes through all of our blind spots. God knows them. God loves us anyway and God supports us. God is with us all the time. It was King David who wrote, "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, you are with me. You are with me." You know my thoughts from afar. You know when I'm rising. You know when I'm sitting. You know all of my blind spots. And even though I walk through the very darkest valley of my life, you are with me.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.