

Blindspots and Shadows

Luke 6.36-42

FUPC

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Do you have any blindspots? What is a blindspot anyway? Well, it's a part of our field of vision where we can't see clearly. Anything happening behind you is a blindspot because you don't have eyes in the back of your head. Although as a kid, I'd want to argue with that one because Mom always seemed to know what I was doing even when she couldn't see me.

Cars have blind spots and big trucks have blind spots despite all the mirrors and windows. You can see them but they can't see you. Some trucks even have a sign that warns drivers that there is a blind spot and the truck driver may not be able to see you.

How about shadows? Of course a shadow is a darkened space created when light is intercepted and blocked. In the light of the sun, shadows are very clear. On a cloudy day, not so clear.

My sermon is entitled Blindspots and Shadows... and I use that title because in today's reading, Jesus is talking about both. In life, you and I live with blindspots and shadows. The passage we read is like a string of pearls... some of our wisest sayings come from this passage.

Judge not that you be not judged. Forgive and you will be forgiven. Give and you will receive. There's the phrase "the blind leading the blind". Take care of the plank in your own eye before removing the speck in your friend's eye. Don't expect to harvest good fruit from a rotten tree.

Each of these phrases is worthy of a sermon, but don't worry... I'm just going to talk about the one phrase that has to do with the way we judge other people – the splinter and the plank. It's something we're all guilty of isn't it. Passing judgment. We look at our family, our friends, our co-workers, our fellow members... and we make judgments about them. Why don't they _____? Why didn't they _____? They shouldn't have _____? They should have _____? If it was me, I'd _____? He / she's not worthy to be / do / have / make _____?

We see people through the filter of our own expectations, life experiences, prejudices, fears, hurt and hopes and the way we see them is colored by all those filters. So Jesus says simply, "Back off"! "Chill"! "Don't you know that you yourself also behave and talk and make decisions in a way that is worthy of being judged? You have a big blind spot."

Jesus uses an image that immediately gets the point across. Your brother or your sister has an imperfection... something that bugs you, bothers you, something you'd love to change. Jesus calls it a splinter. He doesn't say the other person is perfect. He doesn't imply that there is no fault. Yes, there may be a splinter there.

But then he turns it around and points out that we, who are so good at pointing out the splinters in other people, we have a big wooden plank in our own eye... a big log...not just a little splinter... but something that is seriously wrong. He uses humor to paint this funny picture of two people, each with a piece of wood in their eye – the one a splinter and the other a big piece of lumber.

So what's the solution? What does he want us to do about this business of criticizing and judging others when we ourselves are guilty of worse things? Jesus solves the problem of judging others by talking about "mercy". He says, when you're tempted to be critical and judgmental, scolding and complaining about what others say and do... STOP and think... "Be merciful just as your Father in heaven is merciful." (vs. 36).

What is mercy anyway? Here's a simple definition: Mercy is when we are spared a punishment or consequence that we deserve. I get stopped for going too fast in a 35 mph zone. The officer pulls me over and walks up to my window. I thought I was going with the flow of traffic. He singles me out and now I know I'm going to get a ticket. I have my license and registration ready. He says, "Did you know you were going 44 mph back there? It's a 35 mph limit through here." I say, "I know but lost track of my speed" and I'm apologetic. I still deserve the ticket. But he hands me back my license and registration with a warning: "No ticket today. Just want you to slow down and pay attention so that no body gets hurt. Have a nice day. Stay safe." That's mercy. I deserved because I broke the law, but I didn't get it because the officer extended mercy.

Here's some cookie jar theology. Mom says to little Charlie... "Don't take anything from the cookie jar." But Charlie is so hungry and the cookies look so delicious, and he just can't resist... so when Mom isn't looking, he gets the cookie jar and reaches in and take a cookie. Mom's have a way of knowing these things. And when she looks at the jar, she see's its been moved and that some cookies are missing.

So she calls in Charlie and asks him the dreaded question: "Did you take any cookies from the cookie jar?" And Charlie is already feeling the punishment of her anger and knows he did wrong and wishes he hadn't but its too late... so he just answers, with tears running down his cheeks, "Yes, I took some cookies." And Mom, with compassion and wisdom tells him, 'I asked you to not take any cookies. But you took them anyway.' And Charlie is sure he's going to get punished, maybe a spanking, or time out, or no TV.

But Mom says, "I know you're hungry aren't you? And cookies look so good when we're hungry. I won't punish you Charlie, because I know you already feel bad for disobeying me. I want you to learn to obey me. But I love you and I know you're hungry. Come here. Let me give you a hug." That's mercy. Charlie disobeyed and deserved to be punished... but instead Mom gave him a big hug.

Jesus said, "Show mercy to other people just as God has shown mercy to you." That's how God treats us. For all the times we blow it, all the ways we hurt others, violate our own values and make selfish decisions... for all the transgressions that pile up in our lives that could legitimately get us into hot water with our Creator... we receive mercy instead.

Jesus says, "Learn how to cut other people some slack. Back off. Chill. Yeah, you may have every right to be hurt, disappointed, even angry. Surprise people... instead of telling them off, extend mercy. You feel like judging them, condemning them... making them pay for their mistakes. Instead, forgive.

There is a principle of reciprocity in Jesus' words:

To the extent that you judge others, you yourself will be judged.

To the extent that you condemn others, you yourself will be condemned.

To the extent that you forgive a person who has wronged you, you will be forgiven.

Though the details may vary, we are all in the same boat when it comes to being judged. You may be lazy in some ways, but I am selfish. Which is worse? You may be thoughtless at times, but I'm stingy. Which is worse? You blow it your way, and I blow it my way. Our vision is not 20-20 when it comes to seeing ourselves. We can easily spot a defect in our neighbor, and go on and on about it. Seeing our own faults is a bit harder.

Mercy is only one side of the coin. On the other side is Grace. These twin virtues are the way God treats us. They are the expression of God's love for us. If Mercy is when we don't receive the punishment we do deserve, Grace is when we receive a gift that we don't deserve. It's the unexpected blessing we receive when we've treated someone with anger or sarcasm, and instead of punching us out, they treat us to lunch. That's grace. Its taking the cookie when we weren't supposed to, and ending up with a cupcake for dessert.

There was a woman caught in an immoral situation and the Pharisees brought her to Jesus to see what he would do. According to the law, she deserved to be stoned to death. Jesus saw her tears, looked at her accusers and bent down to write in the dirt. What was he writing? I don't know... but I've always imagined he was writing the numbers 1-10... for the ten commandments. Then he said, "Whoever among you is without sin, let him throw the first stone." No one moved. They all had a blind spot and Jesus showed them exactly where it was. They couldn't see their own failure to live up to God's standards.

Finally, after all the crowd had slowly drifted away leaving only the woman with Jesus, he asked her "Where are your accusers?" She said, "There are none." And Jesus replied, "Neither do I condemn you. Go and sin no more." That's mercy. That's grace. Withholding punishment. Getting a new start, a fresh beginning.

Who is it in your life that always seems to push your hot buttons? Got them in mind? Now you have a choice. How will you extend mercy to them this week? Think of just one way that you can extend mercy, in the name of Jesus Christ, to that person who so easily robs you of peace. Can you pray for them? Not in a holier-than-thou manner... but in humility, knowing that in some ways, the plank of wood in your own eye is bigger than the sawdust in theirs. Will you have a chance to speak with them? Listen to your tone of voice, and the more subtle body language and heart talk going on. Invite Christ into the relationship... to be present in healing, cleansing, health-restoring ways.

If our faith doesn't have the power to change us, heal us, restore us at this level, then I wonder if its worth all the time we give to it. May Christ be at home in your life, in your home, in your place of work, in your world this week, to bring healing Mercy and renewing Grace to our brokenness.

Amen.

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