

On Checking the Blind Spot (A Sermon)

Co-missioners,

Today's first-time contributor to Thursday Theology is the Rev. Bradley Haugen, pastor of Follower of Christ Lutheran Church in Plainfield, Illinois. (Plainfield is on the southwest edge of metropolitan Chicago.) Brad is a graduate of Valparaiso University and Luther Seminary. Some years ago he found his way to a Crossings conference and has been involved with Crossings ever since. These days he contributes regularly to Sabbatheology, our weekly text study series.

Brad's gift today is a sermon he preached this past Lent, with a preface added. We recommend it especially for all who serve with him in God's great Easter project of getting "the eyes of [our] heart enlightened" ([Eph. 1:17-18](#)).

Peace and Joy,
The Crossings Community

Don't Forget to Check the Blind Spot

by Brad Haugen

At the Crossings Conference back in January, one important reminder and takeaway for me was the need to go deeper again with the texts of Scripture. The Crossings six-step method of diagnosis and prognosis serves as a discipline to engage and wrestle with Scripture on a deeper level than I otherwise would. To ask not only, "What do I think the text means?" but more

importantly, “What is God in the person of Jesus doing through these words addressed to us?” What is God saying and doing to me and my listeners as I attempt to preach God’s Word for us?



Brad Haugen (green shirt) at 2023 Crossings Conference

A recent Gospel reading from John 9:1-41 about Jesus’s encounter with the blind man was especially illuminating. By opening the eyes of the man who was blind from birth, Jesus, I realized, was also revealing everyone’s blind spot. Using the Crossings method to prepare my sermon, I wanted to link blindness and sight to the relationship problem we have with other people, ourselves, and God. Within everyone’s blind spot is God whom we cannot see or trust on our own. Within that same blind spot are our neighbors (including ourselves) whom we cannot see or love as Jesus does.

Yet Jesus overcomes our blindness to God and our neighbors by giving his life, so that we may have a relationship with God and our neighbors whom we otherwise couldn’t see. He does this not only by opening the eyes of a man who could then see to trust him, but also by drawing all people to himself upon the cross, as the Gospel writer proclaims.

In a recent sermon I preached on [John 9:1-41](#), which I share with

you below, I am grateful to Crossings and the method employed in the weekly text studies that helps me to go deeper in engaging and wrestling with God's Word for us in Scripture.

+ + +

Everyone who's learning to drive needs a reminder to check their blind spot. You can't see everyone and everything in your mirrors, can you? There might be a car in your blind spot that you can't see in your rearview or your side mirror. That's why they call it a blind spot: someone is there even if you can't see them using your mirrors.



Side View Mirror

After all, just because you can't see someone in your rearview or side mirror doesn't mean they're not there. The mirrors can only show you so much. Hence the need for a driving instructor or a nervous parent to remind you: check your blind spot. You look out the window over your shoulder before merging or changing lanes. You check your blind spot to be sure another vehicle isn't there, one you couldn't see in your mirrors.

In today's Gospel according to John, the man who was blind from birth was in everyone's blind spot. As they checked their mirrors, he didn't appear at all. Or if they did happen to notice him, they attributed his blindness to his sin. "...who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" (John 9:2NRSV). Jesus's disciples wanted to know, sizing the man up in their rearview mirror. If the man showed up in their mirrors at all, it was as a sinner whose blindness was somehow deserved.

Jesus, however, wanted everyone to check their blind spot. If all they saw was a sinner when they looked at the blind man – even after Jesus opened the man's eyes – they still didn't really see the man. And it turned out, they didn't really see Jesus either.

In a manner of speaking, people in Jesus's day, as in our own day, would use their mirrors and neglect to check their blind spot. Of course, they weren't literally driving cars. But they neglected to check their blind spot in the sense that they couldn't see the blind man. They certainly couldn't see the man as Jesus saw him: that was their blind spot.

Following religious laws could become like using your mirrors to drive without checking your blind spot.

Here's what the religious authorities and teachers saw as they used their laws as you'd use your mirrors without checking your blind spot. They looked and saw a man born in sin, whose blindness was due to his sin. As long as he remained blind, he could never be righteous before God. He was and would always be a sinner. That's what the mirror, their law, showed them.

When the religious authorities and teachers glanced in the mirror again, they saw another sinner in addition to the blind man. They saw a sinner named Jesus who had broken their law by healing someone on the Sabbath. Opening the eyes of a blind man

on the Sabbath, the day of rest, was a violation of the law. They figured Jesus couldn't be from God since he didn't observe the Sabbath. Jesus did work on the Sabbath – even by performing a work of healing.

The blind man was already a sinner, since he had been blind from birth. And blindness was an outward sign of one's sin or the sin of one's family – one's unrighteousness before God.



Christ Healing the Blind – El Greco (1541–1614)

Image Info about artwork, Public Domain,
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=3677585>

Law-abiding folks in Jesus's day checked their mirrors, their law, and saw two sinners: Jesus and the man blind from birth. But when they saw themselves in that same mirror, according to their law, well, they were doing quite well, comparatively

speaking. The teachers of the law were observing the Sabbath; they weren't working on the day of rest or performing any healings on the Sabbath. And they weren't physically blind like the blind man, meaning, as far as they could tell, their sin wasn't as bad as that of Jesus or the blind man.

Nevertheless, when Jesus opened the man's eyes who had been blind from birth, he was revealing everybody's blind spot. Everyone's. Here was a man blind from birth everyone believed was too far gone – way out of God's reach. The man's sin and blindness separate him from God at birth, now, and forever, as they saw him in the mirror according to their law: the man's a sinner, always has been and always will be.

Yet Jesus insists when he looks at the man blind from birth that God's works will be revealed in him. And God's works are revealed in him – never mind what people see in the mirror, according to their religious law. Jesus shows everyone their blind spot, which is that this man – believed to be a nobody, and a sinner at that – is in fact a beloved disciple and follower of Jesus.

Our laws, like our side and rearview mirrors, can't show us our blind spot. Only Jesus can point out our blind spot: that is, God and the people God loves, whom we don't see in the mirror. Jesus, in fact, reveals to us what we could never see ourselves. He isn't standing with the "holier than thou," law-abiding folks in the religious inner-circles (where we'd rather take our place), but with the folks who've been driven out, who take their place on the outside, at the margins, where no one can see them: in society's blind spot.

That's where the blind man found Jesus again after Jesus had opened his eyes and the leaders had driven the man out. The man found Jesus on the outside and became his follower.

Eventually, for all people, Jesus was outside the city, upon the cross: That is where Jesus promises to draw all people to himself as he is crucified and left to die outside the city gates. On the outside.

Despite our blind spot that makes all of us outsiders to God, Jesus draws you and me to himself. You aren't outside Jesus's line of vision, and neither is the man blind from birth whose eyes Jesus opened.

Our eyes have been opened because Christ has drawn all of us to himself. And because Jesus has drawn us to himself, he urges us to check our blind spot too.

To check our blind spot and make room for the people we'd otherwise look down upon, or neglect to see at all.

To check our blind spot: to listen, to care for, to welcome the folks we once couldn't see as Jesus sees them.

Though because Christ has opened our eyes, we now see he's drawn all of us to himself.

Thursday Theology: that the benefits of Christ be put to use

A publication of the Crossings Community