

Blinded by the light

Readings: Ephesians 5:8 – 14, John 9:26 – 41

Kruger grew up in a Christian family in a part of the States where outward signs of belief were everywhere. He left his abusive father as soon as he could enrolling in the army and heading off to Vietnam. After less than a year he was released with PTSD. He eventually became an accomplished car thief to finance his growing drug habit. Eventually he ended up in jail where the only book to read was a Bible. To his surprise it was actually readable. He could understand it. Overwhelmed he cried out to God to change him and sort out the mess of his life.

When he came out of prison, he tried to do the right thing and headed off to church. On Sunday morning he rocked up to church in the only clothes he owned, with mangled beard and unwashed hair.

He was greeted with “Hey you, mister. What are you doing here?”

I just came to church’ Kruger replied.

“Not looking like that,” the greeter barked at him. “You’ll have to get some church clothes and clean up if you want to come back here.”¹

Memories of his childhood flashed before him. God’s new child, Kruger, asked himself the question: “If I, in my poverty, am acceptable to God, why am I not acceptable to his family?”

I know I have shared Kruger’s story in my church before, but it cuts to the quick on so many levels.

How would you answer Kruger’s question?

Obviously God’s people have no right to call something unclean that God has called clean. See the story of Peter’s dream on the rooftop. He needed to be told three times before he could look past the old paradigm and see things with God’s perspective.²

I believe that we Christians are far too often blind. We see through eyes of tradition and outward appearance. We are like those who questioned the man who was blind. They ended up cursing him while belittling Jesus’ right to heal.

Jesus said to the Pharisees “I entered this world to render judgment—to give sight to the blind and to show those who think they see that they are blind.”

Now I don’t know about you, but I am supremely confident that I am not blind. I have great discernment and can see what is really going on.

¹ Trolls and Truth, Jimmy Dorrell, 37 - 40

² Acts 10

If someone is homeless they have chucked away the opportunities they had.
If they have a flash house and car then they are materialistic.
If they are begging they are probably on drugs.
If they don't have a job they are lazy or unskilled.
If they are a single mother they are immoral.
If they have an abortion they are selfish.
If someone is gay it is because they have chosen that lifestyle.
If they are heterosexual, then they are smug and arrogant about that.

There is a nasty, unthinking, uncaring, tiny blind person buried very deep within my being. And sometimes, fleetingly, that person does think those things. I really dislike that person so when she shows up, I pretend she isn't there.

That person is about as far away from having light from the Lord as it is possible to be. In my worst moments living as a person of light is a joke! There is no light within me to produce anything that is good or right or true.

I am far more like the Pharisees than I care to admit – to myself, let alone to you!

The redeemed part of me doesn't think those things but the trouble is that I am blind to what is really going on, far more often than I want to admit.

Perhaps you think I am being hard on myself?

Perhaps I am.

I certainly want to live as a child of God, as a person of light. I want to escape my blindness; to see clearly as God sees.

The word 'blindness' means complete or nearly complete vision loss. Visual impairment is only partial blindness. It is a decreased ability to see and it causes problems with normal daily activities like driving, reading, socializing, and walking.

In New Zealand, the number of people registered with the Blind Foundation at July 2015 was 12,109. There are lots of different eye conditions: macular disease, cataracts, glaucoma, retinopathy and many more.³

Colour blindness affects around 1 in 12 men and 1 in 200 women in the world.

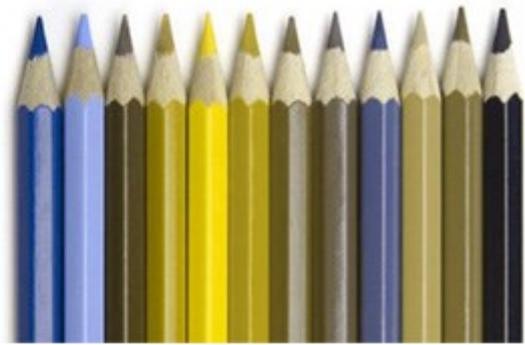
The most common form of colour blindness is red/green colour blindness. That doesn't mean people mix up red and green; it means they mix up all colours which have some red or green in them. For example, a red/green colour blind person will confuse a blue and a purple because they can't 'see' the red element of the colour purple.

³ For numbers in NZ check out <https://blindfoundation.org.nz/eye-info/latest-statistics/>

RED/GREEN COLORBLINDNESS



Normal Vision



Vision affected with
Red/Green Colorblindness

TechWelkin.com

Currently it is impossible to cure colour blindness. However the World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that 80% of visual impairment is either preventable or curable with treatment.⁴

I'm not going to go into the treatment of physical blindness but what might the treatment for spiritual blindness be?

After God gave Peter the same dream three times, finally he was able to see clearly. He said to a group who had been unacceptable to the Jews "I see very clearly that God shows no favouritism."⁵ Then he shared the good news of Jesus with them.

I notice that Peter wasn't able to share any good news until his own blinkers were removed.

Sometimes the Lord God steps in and brings sight to the blind, spiritually, as he does physically. Saul who became Paul is a prime example. The Lord caused physical blindness in him because he was so blind spiritually. Then God brought about release and freedom; salvation in fact. Paul became a new person. It's interesting that this story is told in Acts chapter 9, just before Peter's spiritual blindness is addressed in chapter 10.

Jesus was involved in bringing sight to the blind. His manifesto:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
for he has anointed me to bring Good News to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim that captives will be released,
that the blind will see,
that the oppressed will be set free,
and that the time of the Lord's favour has come. Luke 4:18,19

⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Visual_impairment

⁵ Acts 10:34

Through the Holy Spirit God is still in the business of bringing sight to the blind today; both to those who have never seen and also to those who have seen but fear to see more.

The religious lot (Pharisees) were blind to what God was doing in and through Jesus. It was outside their paradigm.

What things might we be blind to today? Do we miss what God is doing because it is happening in places and through people we don't expect; perhaps even through people we judge or exclude?

There's a movie called Blindness which came out in 2008. It's about a society suffering an epidemic of blindness. The government organizes a quarantine for the blind in a derelict asylum. A doctor is struck with blindness and his wife lies that she has gone blind too so she can go with her husband. In the asylum conditions and human behaviour fall to pieces and the couple try to lead others to safety.

The film was strongly criticized by several organizations representing the blind community. A press release from the American Council of the Blind said "...it is quite obvious why blind people would be outraged over this movie. Blind people do not behave like uncivilized, animalized creatures."

The movie reminded me a bit of Lord of the Flies where human behaviour also deteriorated rapidly without the structures of society to keep things in order. (I studied that book at High School and absolutely hated it.)

I read a blog this week, written by a young pastor, about what he hadn't expected in ministry.

One lament he had was this:

"Justified. Sanctified. Petrified. Seminary never prepared me or told me the ministries biggest road blocks would come from within the church itself.

Dont believe me, just ask around for how many Churches have split over carpet color, contemporary vs. traditional music, chairs or pews or even dodgeballs in the sanctuary."⁶

I pondered his point:

1. Justified –Christ has paid the price for us. So in God's sight we are as if we had never sinned. There is no penalty to pay anymore. Yep, justified works for me.
2. Sanctified – later in Ephesians 5, husbands are urged to follow Christ's loving example:

⁶ <https://pastorjakeroberts.wordpress.com/2017/03/21/5-things-they-never-prepared-me-for-in-seminary/>

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church. He gave up his life for her to make her holy and clean, washed by the cleansing of God's word. v25

The word is one of God's good gifts that operates in the transforming / sanctifying process that the Lord is working in us.

3. Petrified – I think the pastor has used a good word here. I'm guessing he means frozen, solidified, immovable. However the word has another meaning too. 'Petrified' as in 'terrified'.

I wonder if we are so afraid sometimes of our shadow side or our old nature; whatever you want to call it. We suppress this aspect of our nature because we don't like this part of ourselves. We want to be better than we are. But in hiding it away, we give it far more power than it deserves.

Actually, acknowledging and exposing this part of us, removes its power. And it does that because as soon as we are honest with ourselves, with the Lord and when necessary with a trusted other, then the Lord can come in with the transforming power of the Holy Spirit. Our blindness is exposed to his glorious light. Yes it is very scary! It takes great courage.

But the Lord hasn't finished with us yet. When the pastor says his church has been sanctified and is now petrified, I don't think he is correct even though I get the point he is making.

Because sanctification is a process; not a one-off event. (Salvation is once for all. Jesus doesn't have to keep on dying. At the communion service we remember what Jesus has done for us. We don't offer him as a sacrifice again and again as Hebrews reminds us.⁷)

Sanctification is a process of on-going cleansing carried out by the Holy Spirit, through the power of Jesus Christ, in the love of God our heavenly Father. It isn't something we can do. We can't make ourselves any better. But we can bring ourselves into his healing presence in honest acknowledgement of our on-going need for transformation.

Kruger's question in the beginning about why he isn't acceptable to the church has its answer, at least partly, I believe, in the fear we all have of facing ourselves. If we make ourselves above others by looking down on the Krugers of this world, we can ignore our inner blindness.

Remember what Jesus told the religious lot:

I entered this world to render judgment—to give sight to the blind and to show those who think they see that they are blind.

⁷ Hebrews 7:27, 9:12, 9:26,

I want to be like the man who knows he has been blind, not like the religious lot who are blind to their own blindness.

The previously blind man is open to new ways of seeing and understanding. When Jesus asks him “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” the man answers, “Who is he, sir? I want to believe in him.”

And Jesus reveals himself: “You have seen him,” Jesus said, “and he is speaking to you!”

“Yes, Lord, I believe!” the man said. And he worshiped Jesus. He didn’t need to be told three times like Peter or to insult anyone like the religious lot did.

I don’t want to be part of the religious establishment which Jesus says remains guilty because we claim we can see.

We all need a fresh vision of Jesus. It is only Jesus who can show us the reality of what is around us. Only Jesus can show us God’s reality and the reality of our blindness.

Kruger is acceptable to God and to anyone else who has eyes to see themselves as they are and turn to Christ in penitence and faith.

Reflection questions

1. The Pharisees told the healed man “You were born a total sinner!” They thought they knew all the answers and threw him out of the synagogue. John 9:34 What can ‘sinners’ have to teach people who have been part of the church for a long time?
2. Jesus came to “give sight to the blind and to show those who think they see that they are blind.” John 9:39 What blind spots do we have? What things do we need to see with fresh eyes?
3. What does it mean for us to “live as people of light”? Eph 5:8
4. What opportunities can we make for the Light to shine on us more fully?