

Sermon: Are Our Blinders On?

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What happened to John the Baptist? That's the question that comes up for me when I hear today's gospel.

Last week John was a voice crying out in the wilderness. He was preparing the way of the Lord and announcing that the kingdom of heaven had come near. He demanded repentance. He didn't want excuses or explanations, he wanted action and change. He spoke of "the wrath to come," the ax "lying at the root of the trees," and "unquenchable fire."

This week, however, is different. Today John is in prison, and he has a question for Jesus. "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?"

Last week there was no question in his mind, no doubt in his heart, and no hesitation in his words. It was wrath, ax, and fire. He had a singular vision of the kingdom. He was committed to that vision and determined to see it through. And I wonder if that's what happened to John.

Maybe John's singular vision, commitment, and determination have become his blinders. Maybe his vision has become narrow and myopic. After all, wrath, ax, and fire are a far cry from the blind who receive sight, the lame who walk, the lepers who are cleansed, the deaf who hear, the dead who are raised, and the poor who are given good news. Maybe John's focus on wrath, ax, and fire has blurred his vision to everything else that is going on around him.

I know what's that like and how easily it happens to us. Sometimes I get so interested in, possessed by, or committed to something that it becomes the main thing for me, often to the exclusion of other things and people. It's what I talk and think about. I read and study about it. I give it my time and

energy. I'm fully invested in and committed to it. I am determined to see it through. It often becomes the primary driver of my life.

Maybe that is when someone needs to tell me, that I have blinders on. Perhaps that when I have tunnel vision. When I can't see anything but this one thing.

Sometimes we put on blinders and sometimes our focus becomes our blinders. Either way it leaves us in prison; incarcerated by our inability or unwillingness to see more, to imagine other ways or possibilities, to consider something new, different, or totally unexpected. Most anything can become blinders. Blinders can range from the ecstatic and joyful to the tragic and painful.

For John, wrath, ax, and fire are the blinders that keep him from recognizing the Messiah who comes through compassion, healing, new life, and hope. I don't say that as a judgment or criticism of John. I say it in recognition that I'm not all that different from John and you probably aren't either.

I suspect we all have blinders. Each of us has our own version of wrath, ax, and fire. Each of us wears blinders that narrow and limit our vision of ourselves, one another, the world, and God. Some blinders we choose. Some we are born into. And some grow over time like a cataract.

Regardless of how they come about blinders diminish life. They cause us to see one thing and miss all the other things. They imprison us in a one-dimensional view of a multi-dimensional life and world. They tempt us to believe that what we see is all there is. They take away our peripheral vision and hide a larger reality.

Let me tell you about some of my blinders.

- Sometimes the darkness of violence and injustice keep me from seeing and hearing how others are working for peace and change.

Sometimes my feelings of being overwhelmed and powerless to make a difference blind me to what I can do. My sorrow and grief over what have happened in various corners of the world have been blinders to joy, hope, and laughter.

- That I am a white, middle class, educated, female often blinds me to the experiences and needs of those different from me. Past guilt and regret have made it difficult to see the gift of forgiveness and the possibility of reconciliation. Sometimes my fear, suspicion, or prejudice of another are blinders to her or his humanity and dignity.
- I struggle with taking off the blinders of work so I can see and show up for those I love. Busyness and exhaustion are my blinders to the beauty around me and the invitation to creativity. And like John, there have been times when my expectations of who and how Jesus should be, have prevented me from recognizing the divine presence within me.

What is it for you?

Maybe you're wearing some of the blinders I listed. Maybe you are wearing others. What blinders are you wearing today? In what ways have they imprisoned you? And what is the good news you need to hear today?

Do you need light in the darkness? "The blind receive their sight."

Do you need to know that things can change, and you are not powerless? "The lame walk."

Do you need to feel comfortable and at home in your own skin? "The lepers are cleansed."

Do you need a word of encouragement, affirmation, or guidance? "The deaf hear."

Do you need a future and new possibilities? "The dead are raised."
Do you need joy or hope? "The poor have good news brought to them."

I wonder what all that means for you today, your life as it is and the blinders you wear. What is being offered to you? And what is being asked of you?

I think Jesus is describing for John, for you and me, what life without binders is like. It's the life I want, don't you? So, tell me, is he the one to come, or are you waiting for another?

We can still doubt, even when we have faith. Just like John the Baptist, we can find ourselves in a place where our faith starts shaking and crumbling.

But when we do, Jesus invites us to look around. See this beautiful world. Take a breath. Receive again the gift of our very existence.

Trust God. Trust God's slow work. Trust God's promise of presence. Believe that God so loved the world that God's son was born for us. Kneel with wonder and in adoration of the child in the manger. Believe in the Saviour born for us; who grew up to heal and to teach and to proclaim good news; who died, and who rose again, and who promises to return to bring the kingdom of God in all its fullness to a world that longs for this, even when it doesn't know it, and even when it struggles to believe it. Amen