

1) Perception depends on perspective—

what we see is always framed by which way we are looking.

We can shift our point of view, of course—turn in a different direction.

We can even turn back to observe the place from which we were just looking.

But we can't face different directions simultaneously—or see everything at once.

(Trying makes you seriously dizzy.)

Seeing requires a vantage point—but that vantage point also creates a blind spot.

At the heart of perception is a paradox:

What makes perception possible makes blind spots inevitable.

So it's mighty good to have the benefit of other pairs of eyes:

What do YOU see? WOW! I didn't see it that way at all!

2) Today we hear two stories of what folks can clearly see—and what they clearly can't:

- King Ahab sees a vineyard—one he can just see as his private vegetable garden.
He just can't see why he can't have it—he'd gladly pay—and he's the king.
- Naboth sees not only his beloved land, but his God-given family heritage.
He just can't see why he should trade it—or sell it for any price.
- Jezebel sees what can be done—quick and easy—to get her hubby his little farm.
She just can't see any negative repercussions from her illegal power play.
- Simon the Pharisee—he sees a cringe-worthy public display of affection.
He just can't see the common courtesies he has failed to provide for his guest.
And he can't see the woman as anything but utterly disgusting.
- This “sinner” woman—she sees someone who has seen her as God's beloved child.
She just can't see that her show of gratitude will stigmatize her further.
- For all the main characters in these two stories, the fields of perception are the same.
But they see those fields from vastly different vantage points with different blind spots.
Thus, these characters inhabit radically different, mutually incompatible worlds.

3) There is, however, another character in each story—another pair of eyes.

Truth be told, they have certain “blind spots” of their own.

- Elijah just can't see how the power of Jezebel and Ahab grants them any moral license.
What he does see is where their blind spots will eventually bring them.
- Jesus just can't see why social propriety should trump heartfelt thanksgiving.
What he does see is a religious leader whose blind spot comes from moral rigor.

4) The problem with inviting the perspective of other pairs of eyes is that,
much though we may need them, we sometimes don't much want them.

Once we are settled in position, it gets increasingly harder to change our vantage point.

Each new perception further validates the perspective from which we're already looking—

- Blinds us to the fact that it's not the only vantage point from which to look.
- Renders us resistant to, even incapable of seeing things from other angles—after all, from where we're looking we can see so well.

In addition to denying ourselves the prospect of fuller vision,

our perceptions can take high tolls on moral innocents like Naboth,
and on women, men, and children—perceived as somehow “sinful.”

Self-constricted vision isn't all that great for our own health, either.

The Elijah story has chapters yet to go, but for Ahab and Jezebel the die is cast already.

They are dead monarchs walking because they can't see things any other way.

The Jesus story Luke tells is more open ended—will Simon acquire different vision?

- Will the parable Jesus tells him help him turn his head?
- Will it enable him to re-vision what righteousness is all about—relationships set right, reestablished, and rejoiced in, rather than seeing to it that every infraction is perpetually punished.

Maybe Jesus's simple story of a small debtor loving little, and a large debtor loving much will help Simon open his eyes to his own blind spot.

Ahab and Jezebel will end up toast—like they've made toast of Naboth;
but maybe, someday, somehow Simon and the forgiven woman
will end up healed and reconciled. We can always hope.

5) But here's the question:

if all perception is perspective-limited, and everyone has blind spots;

are the eyes of Elijah or of Jesus really any “better” or more privileged than any other?

With their “blind spots” are they too, like all perceivers everywhere,
incapable of seeing the whole picture?

Are we all consigned to the fate of the six blind men in the classic Hindu parable,

all of whom have different, seemingly incompatible perceptions of the same elephant?

Here, perhaps, is one way to begin thinking about that question:

- There is a similarity in the blind spots of Ahab, Jezebel, and Simon
- There is a similarity in the “blind spots” of Elijah and of Jesus
- And there is a significant difference
between the blind spots of the former and the blind spots of the latter.

The blind spots of Ahab, Jezebel, and Simon the Pharisee come from

how oblivious they are to interplay of power and perception

that leads us to regard others as purely instrumental—or merely oppositional—
to our own egos.

On the other hand, the blind spots of Elijah and Jesus
come from a conscious decision to disregard the dangers we might well incur
when we chose to perceive the world from the vantage point of the vulnerable.

There is a profound difference
between blind spots that come from lack of self-reflection—
not turning to see where our previous perceptions have come from;
AND blind spots that come in being free from self-fixation—
determining to see through, and on behalf of, the eyes of others.
refusing to be distracted by the considerable costs involved.

6) *Do you see this woman?* Jesus asks Simon.

At one level, it's a silly question. Of course Simon sees her.

At another level, it's the critical question. Because he really doesn't see her at all.

The question is an invitation for Simon to change his vantage point.

Because Jesus sees the woman as he does, however,

she does change her vantage point—she begins to see herself as Jesus sees her.

7) As members of Christ's body we return here, week after week, to reorient our vantage point.

To re-set our perceptions, the better to see
ourselves, each other, our neighbors and our nation—

to see the world God made and loves—to see all these more like the way God sees them.

Open our eyes, O God, to see your hand at work in the world about us.

*Let the grace of the Holy Communion we share this day make us one body, one spirit,
that we may worthily serve the world in his name.*