

We learn to do it very early.

- Play with the toys all day but not “notice” that they’re all over the floor when it’s time for bed.

We keep learning to do it as we grow older.

- Come to the end of the toilet paper roll but not “notice” so we don’t get another.
- Not “notice” that the phone is ringing; it’s probably for someone else anyway.
- Leave dishes in the sink but not “notice” that they’re dirty; someone else can wash them later.
- Not “notice” that the ice tray is empty when putting it back in the freezer; the next person will.

We keep learning as adults.

- Run the gas tank to empty, but not “notice” that it is, so the person driving next can fill it.
- Take the trashcan out but not “notice” it’s still there the next day; someone else can get it.
- Wash clothes but “forget” to move them to the drier; the next one to use it may do it.
- Receive messages of concern from teachers and coaches, pastors and youth leaders but not “notice” anything to be concerned about with our child, so there’s no need to do anything.
- Keep talking about ourselves, so we don’t have to hear about anybody else and have to respond.

See a pattern? I’m sure you could come up with many more examples of such behavior – avoiding “noticing” things in order to avoid doing something. I guess that’s why people say that “ignorance is bliss.” The “bliss” is getting to avoid responsibility; the “bliss” is being able to be “irresponsible.”

We learn early that being “response-able,” able to respond, starts with seeing, seeing the situation, seeing what needs to be done. If we can avoid “seeing,” avoid noticing things, if we can ignore them, we’re not “response-able,” no one has a right to expect anything of us. That’s why though we may say, “tell me what you want me to do, and I’ll do it,” the real message is, “don’t expect me to see anything and do it on my own. I prefer to not see things, so that I’m not “response-able.””

We think we’ll be happier if we don’t “know” things, if we’re “ignorant” of them. Knowing makes us response-able – response-able to get the TP roll and put it on, response-able to answer the phone, response-able to do the dishes, response-able to fill the gas tank or the ice cube tray, response-able to bring back the trash can, response-able move our own clothes out of the washer, response-able to deal with our child’s problem (or perhaps our own).

That’s why I sometimes wonder if we shouldn’t pronounce the word “ignorance” as *ignorance*. There’s a willful quality about the things we pretend or claim not to know. Much of what we do not know, we know, but it’s hard to admit that we know – that would make us responsible. So we ignore.

Jesus is having dinner at a Pharisee’s house. During the meal a “woman of the city” comes in, lets down her hair, and throws herself at Jesus’ feet, kissing and caressing them. It’s more than the host, and probably many of his guests, can take. He mutters to himself loud enough for all to hear, “If this man were a real prophet he’d see what sort of woman she is.” Jesus ought to know - she’s a “sinner!”

After all, isn’t that what we expect of religious, particularly “prophetic,” people? They should be

able to see sin a mile away and name it for what it is.

Then Jesus asks the Pharisee, “Do you see this woman?” It’s a revealing question. “Do you see this woman? No, the Pharisee doesn’t really see her. He sees only a “sinner.” He ignores the rest of her.

The host, a self-righteous religious guy, doesn’t really see this woman. He sees a label, someone who’s been pigeonholed as a “sinner.” That’s all he sees – a category not a person.

That’s so much easier isn’t it? It’s so much easier to accept the label that’s been applied to a person, and not notice, much less bother to look for, anything more. If you have a category, a label, you know what to do; you don’t have to bother to think about anything else. And if the label says “sinner” and you’re a good, righteous person, all you need to do is keep your distance, stay away, not get involved! You are NOT response-able to sinners! You’re responsible to keep yourself pure!

Jesus doesn’t deny that this woman’s a sinner. But when he looks at her he sees more. He sees a “daughter of Abraham.” He sees that she’s also a member of the family. She also has a claim upon the goodness and mercy of God. He sees beyond her label; he sees her differently than others do.

There’s a great deal of “ignore” in our ignorance.

That’s why it’d be a mistake for us to focus only on the Pharisee and the sinner woman. What we need to focus on is on Jesus. We need to “see” as Jesus sees, what he sees and how he sees.

“Do you see this woman?” Jesus asked Simon. The answer is, sure, Simon sees her but not as Jesus sees her. We need to “see” what Jesus sees and see how he sees.

Repeatedly in his ministry, Jesus recovers sight for the blind. The blindness he heals isn’t just physical; it’s spiritual. It heals us from a spirit of “ignore-ance. So we can see as he sees.

Jesus is working at that all the time.

One day Jesus’ disciples watched people in the temple, making their offerings. They were impressed by the huge sums of coins the rich people dropped in. They didn’t notice a poor widow, who only put in a penny. To them, her offering was insignificant, not “of note; so, it went unnoticed, unseen.

But Jesus saw her offering. And he said, “This poor widow has given more than everyone else combined, because she gave all that she had.” Do you see this woman? No, not till you mentioned it.

Jesus gives us many gifts, so that we’re equipped to be his disciples. Christians believe that these gifts are given by the Holy Spirit, and that they’re given to be used as followers of Jesus.

And among the many gifts that he gives us, one of the gifts is the gift of sight. Jesus becomes the lens through which we look at the world. Looking through him, to the world, we see things that the world doesn’t see. We notice things that the world tends to overlook.

After his death, the church Martin Luther served created an altar piece, which includes a picture of him preaching. He’s in the pulpit on one side, preaching, and as he speaks he points toward Christ, hanging on the cross. On the other side, just beyond the cross, is the congregation.

In other words, the crucified Christ is the lens between preacher and congregation. The preacher looks at the congregation through the crucified Christ, enabled to see them, to some degree, as Jesus

does. The congregation listens to the word, and looks at the preacher, who preaches, by means of the crucified Christ. They look through Christ, beyond the preacher's words, into the world, seeing the world differently because they've been given new eyes, Jesus' eyes. So they can begin to see one another and the world as Jesus sees.

This is a kind of metaphor for our worship and Sunday school. We gather to worship and to learn so that the crucified Christ can become the lens through which we look at one another and the world.

That's how the Bible creates a new world. John Calvin called scripture the "lens" through which Christians see the world. As with a new pair of glasses, this new lens of the Bible brings things into focus that we hadn't noticed before. Other things that once were special fade out of focus.

Jesus was forever taking things that the world considered inconsequential – a widow's coin, a lost sheep, a lost boy – and helping us see these seemingly small and unimportant things as God sees them – as cherished and precious. After we've heard Jesus' stories it ought to be hard to walk past some poor, lost soul as we once did. Jesus has given us a new "lens" for looking at the world.

When she first went to work at a new downtown office, a woman noticed a man standing on the street corner in tattered clothes, with his hand out, seeking money.

"When I first went to work there, I noticed him," she said. "But some months later, when one of her coworkers said, "You know that old man that stands on the corner, every day, begging?" She said, "But he's not there anymore, is he? He used to be there, but now he's gone."

Her coworker insisted that he was still there. Well, the next day on her way to work, she was shocked to see the old man standing there, as he'd always been, with his hand out. He hadn't gone away. Her ability to see him had failed, had been blinded. She no longer noticed him. She realized that she'd grown accustomed not to seeing him in her mind.

The next day she left for work a bit early and stopped and talked to the man for the first time. She learned that he was down on his luck that he'd once worked near that corner, and more. At the end of their talk, when she opened her wallet and pulled out some cash, he refused to take it, saying "It was just good to talk to you. That's was the best thing you could've given me."

Later she said, "I believe that God sent that man to me to help me see as Jesus sees."

I believe God has sent each of us someone to help us do just that – see as Jesus sees. The question is, are we open to the help. Accepting it will mean no more "ignore-ance is bliss." Accepting it will mean that we become "response-able."

Jesus wants to help us see as he sees? What do you say? Are you open to the help? Amen.

Dear Lord,

Forgive us for the ways in which we ignore those whom you love and for whom you died.

Forgive us for the ways we walk past those who are in need

....because their need might intrude on our placid lives and make difficult demands upon us.

Forgive us for the ways we tend to see our friends and family first,

....without looking beyond our circle to those caught in your wide embrace.

For your transforming, healing grace, we give thanks.

All-Seeing God, you see us as we truly are – but that doesn't seem to matter.

We who have received your grace raise our hands in gratitude.

You have not ignored our wayward attitudes – you know us better than we know ourselves.

You did not dismiss our thoughtlessness – you named it.

And despite all you know – you are ready more than ever to forgive us!

How can we express our thankfulness?

How can we live as one truly forgiven?

Help us to extend to others the grace you've showered on us, so all may know the joy of salvation.

Hosanna! Hallelujah! Thanksgiving, praise, and honor to the God who knows all, and forgives all!

For our sins that we freely confess, those we acknowledge and regret,

....those that we know too well and that we reject because we love you.

Open our eyes so we may see clearly and repent.

For the sins we suspect, for the sins we hide, for those we justify, and those we even cherish,

....for the alienation we willfully widen, for the gulf that widens between us and you.

Open our eyes that we may see clearly and repent.

For our institutional sins, for the harm we cause because of the things we buy,

....the businesses we support, the economies we share, those things of which we are ignorant,

...the harm we willfully ignore.

Open our eyes that we may see clearly and repent.

O God, heal our ignore-ance.

Melt our hardness of heart, release us from the shackles we have forged ourselves by our choices,

....redeem us as your servants, and restore us to your favor.

For ourselves and for each other we pray. Amen.