

As many of you know, I got a new car a couple of weeks ago, and to say it has been an adjustment is probably a bit of an understatement. I hadn't quite processed how truly *old* my previous car was until I spent a couple of days in my new one. My Fusion was a 2009 and when I had gotten it, it was fresh off the assembly line, with what then were all the latest bells and whistles that Ford was putting into their cars. I was the first one in my family to have a Bluetooth system in my car, able to press a button and ask my car to call someone or turn the music on on my phone. I had my six disc CD changer, and a decent sound system and I thought that car was about as high end as I could get.

Well, 257,000 miles and 13 years later...high end had become painstakingly mediocre. My CD changer no longer worked, in fact I traded it in with CDs left in the system, forever stuck and unable to be removed. A piece of my sunroof had broken rendering it not super smart to use, because there was never a guarantee it would close fully, and my SYNC system sometimes just decided it didn't want to listen to me unless I was yelling at it with completely clear and ridiculous enunciation. Enter in my new car. It's taken a bit to get used to all the fancy. I don't have to yell at it anymore to connect to my phone, it does it by itself by being plugged in. My sunroof is functional. CD players aren't even a thing anymore in this car. I have a

backup camera and the whole push to start thing, and it's all taken a lot to get used to, but there is one thing that I got used to immediately and love even if I have to be careful with it: blind spot sensors.

I'm guessing most of you know what I'm talking about here. There are sensors in my mirrors that can identify when a car is next to me or in my blind spot and when there is one there, a light comes on on my mirror to let me know, hey! Don't get over. It blinks at me if the distance is questionable and generally just tries to make sure that you don't merge into anyone on the expressway. It's a good safety feature, but here's the thing, much like my backup camera, I don't want to get to a point where I rely on it. It feels unnerving to drive and trust that your car knows if you're going to back into something and yell at you without you having to look over your shoulder. It's a weird level of faith in technology that your car is going to recognize the vehicles next to you or just a smidge behind you and tell you not to merge. I'm not sure I ever want to shake the instinct to check my blind spot before moving over because what if the sensor isn't working? What if there is a car that hasn't quite hit the sensor but it is still too close for comfort to merge? It's too questionable for me. If you're going to be driving safely, even with all the bells and whistles, it still feels like you need to check your blind spot.

They're a curious thing...blink spots, because, as we all know, they don't just apply to driving, but to our entire worldview when we take a step back and examine how we view the world and our neighbors whom surround us on a daily basis. And it's at that point that we find ourselves standing squarely in the middle of the gospel, associated with someone that I have a feeling most of us would really rather have some distance from, because in the world of Jesus' parables, you never want to be associated with the bad guy, yet...I fear...here we are.

We're still in the thick of this conversation that Jesus is having with the scribes and Pharisees about God's people and their relationship to wealth—never anyone's favorite topic to be sure, but when you're the one you know is being targeted, I can't imagine these guys are reacting super well to the story being told, and Jesus isn't exactly pulling any punches here, if anything he keeps upping the ante. He's gone through the whole no one can serve two masters thing, but now he's driving straight to the heart of it, and giving them a prime example that probably hits too close to home.

You have a rich man whose life is exceedingly cushy. He dresses in fine, purple linen—an indicator of his wealth since purple was the most expensive dye to purchase in Jesus' time, usually associated with royalty. In a predominantly agrarian culture, Jesus says that he feasts sumptuously, not

just on occasion, but everyday. It doesn't say that he is feasting with others, sharing what is on his table, but that he enjoys it himself. Finally, Jesus adds that he lives in a house big enough that it requires a gate. So this isn't like oh ya know I'm comfortable wealth, this is *wealth*, like top tier, extravagant wealth, that he clearly has no interest in sharing.

Jesus sets up a clear juxtaposition between this rich man and Lazarus, interesting that Jesus gives the person most people would ignore a name in this parable, and leaves the wealthy man as a nameless figure. Lazarus is poor, sick, malnourished, begging for scraps outside the gate of this rich man's house. It doesn't seem possible that the rich man could live his entire life with Lazarus going unnoticed. It seems Lazarus is an indelible part of the landscape of the rich man's life, just a part that he chooses not to see, and certainly not one that he chooses to address in any way.

Despite the disparity in their life circumstances, their fate is in some ways the same. Both men die. There is no wealth to be carried into the afterlife. No purple cloth to surround yourself with. At the end of the day, for the rich man and Lazarus the end brings them to the same circumstances, just in vastly different locations. Now, you would think that with where he finds himself and where he sees Lazarus, that the rich man would have learned something, but all he does is prove his continued ignorance and his

continued inability to truly *see* Lazarus. Rather than talking to him, the rich man talks to Abraham. He never addresses Lazarus directly, and even in death, the rich man simply sees Lazarus as someone he should be able to command and direct, someone beneath him who can serve his needs and serve the needs of his family. Abraham has zero time for this nonsense, and basically tells the rich man, tough. Lazarus is not there to serve anyone but God, and if the rich man's brothers don't have the ability to listen to the Moses and the prophets, as he clearly didn't either in his life, well then there is no help for them. They have all the opportunity in the world, just as he did, to live out God's word, it's not up to Lazarus to save them, especially when none of them were interested in saving him in life.

Our lives are filled with blind spots, but more often than not, much like the rich man, they are willful, intentional blind spots, and we tell ourselves any number of stories we can in order to avoid having to look at them head on. There is the obvious, direct equivalent of this story. The number of people without homes, the people in need of help, of food, of a scrap of anything that we willfully walk or drive by on a daily basis. Every year when we do PORT there's always this shock at how much homelessness is in Newport News, and yet, it's there, we just choose not to see it until it's right in front of our faces and we can feel good about the one

day a year that we choose to help. Since COVID, agencies like Thrive and Link have seen exponential increases in the amount of people who need help, and yet, mostly we want to ignore them because we think we have any number of reasons for why they've gotten themselves into this mess.

But then there are our maybe not so obvious blind spots. How many of us choose on a near daily basis to ignore our black and brown siblings and the things they have to say about racism, oppression, and the intersectionality of race, poverty, and access to resources that exist in all of our communities? How many of us have turned off the news or scrolled past a post because we are just so tired of *everything being about race*? How many of us have said that we don't see color and think that that's a blanket statement that says we are free from racism, when in fact by saying we don't see color, it is denying, turning a blind eye to the reality of our black and brown siblings lives lived out in a world that absolutely sees color and very rarely sees it and thinks it's good.

How many of us turn a blind eye to issues of environmental justice that rage all around us? For sure, we lament that summer seems to start earlier and last longer, we pray for rain amidst drought, and we keep an eye on storms in the Gulf, but rarely do we let ourselves think through the ways

in which we operate in the world which directly and negatively impact the beauty of God's creation all around us.

How many of us turn a blind eye to our LGBTQIA+ siblings proclaiming that there just seem to always be more letters and that's too much to learn or keep up with? How frequently do we ignore the pleas from our siblings who just want to be seen and loved for who they are, rather than being judged, ridiculed, and exiled for who they were created to be? We confine them to the margins saying sure, you're accepted but just as long as you don't talk about all this stuff all the time. We can talk about our lives as much as we want, but we really need you to keep quiet, because it just makes us uncomfortable and the focus doesn't need to be on you?

There are worlds more. We all know the ones that we have. The ones that perpetually are blinking in our mirrors as we walk through God's world, desperately trying to get our attention and say hey, pay attention to what's going on around you on who is around you! If you got into an accident because you forgot to check your blind spot, the cops wouldn't really take that as an excuse to let you go with a warning. The responsibility is on you, whether or not your car has a sensor. The same goes for us, our blind spots are our responsibilities, to check, to examine, to see, so that we don't quash the love and life out of our siblings because we refuse to see them. **AMEN!!**