

INSIDE/OUT (GOSPEL OF LUKE) – Kirsten Anonby

Luke 11:33–36 | March 13, 2022

Introduction

When I was a kid there was a fairy tale I loved called the Snow Queen. (Disney took the idea of a snow queen and created the character Elsa, but that's about all the similarity you'll find between Frozen and Hans Christian Anderson's story). This fairy tale describes a magic mirror that only reflects what is evil and hateful. The mirror splinters into millions of tiny pieces that fall all over the world, getting into peoples' eyes and hearts, freezing their hearts into unfeeling blocks of ice and making their eyes like the mirror itself, seeing only the bad and ugly in people and things.

Two of these splinters land in a boy named Kay – one in his eye and one in his heart – and those tiny glass fragments change everything. He is suddenly unable to see the beauty in the things and people around him – all he notices are their imperfections. And he is no longer able to value and love the people closest to him – including his best friend Gerda (who is the hero of the story). Kay is only saved when his dear friend Gerda finally finds him; he is icy and heartless, but as she cries over him her tears of love wash away the splinter in his heart. Kay once again is able to feel, and when he cries of tears joy the fragment in his eyes is washed away. Finally, his eyes are healthy and able to see clearly, and his heart is healthy and once again able to love.

Fairy tales can make truths plain. For me, this one draws out one of the essential challenges of being a broken human being. We all are vulnerable to getting something in our eyes – something in our hearts. That something distorts our perceptions of reality and makes it challenging for us to recognize what's beautiful, what's good, what's true. It can make it easy for us to miss the goodness of God.

Our text for today is all about that something in our eyes – our capacity as broken people to not see clearly.

We have been in Luke 11 for the past couple of weeks – following one long conversation between Jesus and the crowd. This conversation begins when Jesus does what he often does: set someone free from demonic oppression – once he does, a man who was mute is able to speak. When this happens the people are amazed, which is not surprising – many other times the crowd is amazed at what Jesus does.

Not everyone in the crowd, though, is amazed. This time, the crowd begins to turn on Jesus. Some are skeptical and want proof. They don't want proof that the exorcism happened – no one is questioning that. They had just seen a man released from demonic power – joyfully set free to use his voice. What they are skeptical about is where the power behind Jesus's ministry comes from. And so, some of them accuse him of being in league with Satan, while others demand that he do yet another miraculous sign to prove who he is.

This is not necessarily the response Jesus was hoping for. You can hear his frustration in his responses – and I can understand why. Jesus brings the goodness of God to people – healing and setting them free – and he's met with suspicion, doubt, and even slander (the creator of the world has just been called the servant of Satan – that's pretty bad). If we were dealing with the Greek God Zeus here, you'd probably see some lightning bolts flying.

But this isn't Zeus, it's Jesus. So, he speaks the truth to the crowd that he knows they need to hear, knowing that hearing and accepting the truth he speaks to them – even if it's difficult to hear, is their best chance of them accepting Him, and the goodness that He has for them.

First he uses logic to explain that it makes no sense for him to be in league with Satan when he's setting people free from demonic power. Doesn't it make more sense, he suggests, that what actually is happening is that someone even stronger than the enemy has entered the scene?

And then, in the passage Dave shared out of last week, Jesus rebukes the crowd for asking for a sign – for even more proof that He is who He says he is. The only sign they will get, he explains, is the permanent sign – the sign of Jonah. The only sign of his identity they will receive is that he will die a criminal's death on a cross and be vindicated by his physical resurrection from the dead. "If you really want proof of who I am," Jesus essentially says, "just wait."

At the end of that reproof is our text for today – which explains why this group of Jews, who have waited for the Messiah their whole lives, are standing before him without even realizing it. It all comes down to the fact that there's something in their eyes . . .

Luke 11:33–36

³³ "No one lights a lamp and puts it in a place where it will be hidden, or under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, so that those who come in may see the light. ³⁴ Your eye is the lamp of your body. When your eyes are healthy, your whole body also is full of light. But when they are unhealthy, your body also is full of darkness. ³⁵ See to it, then, that the light within you is not darkness. ³⁶ Therefore, if your whole body is **full of light**, and no part of it dark, it will be just as **full of light** as when a lamp shines its light on you." (Luke 11:33–36– NIV)

The imagery in the Text:

1. Jesus begins by reminding them that light serves a purpose.

- No one lights a lamp without the intention of letting the light be seen. A lamp is lit so that people can see. Light shows us truth about things – so much so that when we talk about "coming into the light" we are referring to the act of walking out of falsehood into truth.
- Light shows us things.
 - o The first sunny day in a while is always a bit of shocker for me. On mellow rainy days I think my house is pretty clean, and then I get up on a bright sunny morning, and I discover just how dirty my windows are . . . just how much dust is in my living room. Light shows us things.
 - o And because of how it shows us things, light is used in the Bible as a metaphor for goodness. "God is light," 1 John 1 tells us, "and there is no darkness in him."
- Jesus calls himself the light of the world in John 8, and then in Matthew 5 he turns around and uses that same term of us. "You are the light of the world," he tells us, "like a city on the hill that cannot be hid . . . let your good deeds shine out for all to see – so that everyone will praise the Father."

2. Jesus applies the image of a lamp to our eyes – calling them the lamp of the body.

- And this can be a bit of a confusing analogy for us. We know how the eye works. We know that our eyes don't create light, but receive it. Our eye is a receptor. The eye is only the lamp of the body in the sense that it that it is through our eyes that we receive light.
- However, the Greco-Roman world didn't know this was how the eye worked. Instead, they believed that the eye emitted light that came from the body. So, for the person in the 1st century, this image would have made perfect sense.
- Jesus here is using imagery that his hearers could understand. The eye is the lamp of the body, that enables a person to see.

3. Healthy vs Unhealthy Eyes

- Jesus starts to mess with this image when He points out that not all lamps are in the same condition. Your eye is the lamp of your body, but Jesus suggests that we make sure our eyes are actually doing their job, because it's possible that our eyes could be unhealthy. And when our eyes are unhealthy it is very possible for the light we think we have to actually be darkness. And this is a rather chilling thought.
- Earlier in vs. 29 Jesus says that it's an evil generation that asks for a sign.

- Here in vs. 34 the word the NIV translates as “unhealthy” is actually the same word translated as “evil” in vs. 29. This parallel use of the same word points to a connection between these two thoughts. And if we put those two thoughts together we come up with Jesus’ central point: “this generation is evil because its eyes are unhealthy.”
- One of the most disconcerting things to remember about this story is that the people in the crowd that were skeptical of Jesus – who claimed he was in league with Satan and tried to make him prove himself—
 - o they thought they were doing the right thing
 - o They likely thought that in their skepticism of Jesus they were honouring their faith . . . honouring Yahweh
 - o How heartbreaking that he was right there in front of him.

Jesus calls us in this passage to make sure that the light we think is within us is not actually darkness. Or, to put it more bluntly . . . Tread carefully, because you may be wrong.

- Jesus is calling us here to a posture that I would suggest is central to the Christian life – one of dependence – not just for the strength to make it through our days, or for the capacity to love the people around us, or to make sure we do what is right, but to discern what false and what is true.
- Luke said a few weeks ago that Jesus is in the business of turning hearts inside out—this doesn’t just involve our emotions . . . our loves . . . it also involves our assumptions, our perspectives, our understanding of ourselves, our understanding of the world around us.
- We’ve used the image in this series of a sifting through the contents of a backpack with Jesus. We have within that backpack a host of perceptions and assumptions about the world, about ourselves, about the people we love most. This time of preparation for Easter is a time of looking at our perceptions with Jesus – to give Him the space to show us where our thinking is distorted and broken.

A Counter-Cultural Process

Now, I want to acknowledge just how counter cultural a process like this is. Our culture teaches that we discover truth by looking inside ourselves. The more internal our process of determining who we are and what we think, the more genuine and truly authentic we are as people. A sense of identity or conviction that has been formed from something beyond ourselves is viewed by our society as inauthentic. This is why we hear people say things like “my truth.” They’re speaking of their own personal belief, and putting the stamp of truth on it in order to give it the authority of truth. And in the process, of course, they end up defining truth in a way that runs completely counter to any historic understanding of what the word actually means.

Be we, as Christians, are a peculiar people – we always have been. And we approach our understanding of what it means to be human with two fundamental assumptions:

1) We were designed to be in relationship with God.

- God never intended to make people and then leave them alone. This whole crazy enterprise of making people was out of the overflow and abundance of the love between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Our God wanted to love more. So, He created us – made in his image, in order to love us – to know us and be known by us.
- One of the most fundamental biblical concepts of what it means to be human is that we were built for dependent relationship – and that this dependence doesn’t hinder or diminish our growing – but is actually a catalyst for growth. We were never meant to be on our own. For us as people to grow into dependence on God is to grow up.
- The image of people in garden before the fall is one of dependence on God. We did not fall from independence into dependence. We fell from dependence.

2) We have learned the hard way in our world that we are a broken people. A biblical understanding of that brokenness is that there is no part of our personhood that is not impacted by sin. So, that means that our self-understanding is broken, our emotions, our thoughts, our bodies, our will. And this is where we come to the statement Jesus makes in this passage: *Make sure that the light you think you have is not actually darkness.*

- With our broken bodies, minds, and emotions, it's completely possible for us to think the darkness in us is actually light.
- In one of the most significant moments of coming out of brokenness in my life, I heard the Lord say very clearly to me that because of sin in my life, I was kind of blind – and I needed to take extra pains to trust the believers around me who were speaking truth in my life. If I hadn't listened to them – even when they said things I didn't like – things would not have gone well for me.

These two biblical realities of what it means to be human—that we were built for dependence and are broken, help to define our posture in life. We do not walk with a self-sufficient understanding of the world – we walk with an open and listening heart, dependent on Jesus to keep our vision clear. We walk with an awareness that the splinters of our own brokenness have the capacity to distort our vision – our anger and our wounds, our arrogance and perfectionism, our pain and our pride, our fears and our passions, our selfishness.

Thankfully we are not responsible to clean up the darkness in our own hearts on our own. When Jesus calls us to make sure that the light within us is not darkness, He calls us to an active posture of listening to Him – a regular rhythm of allowing His Spirit to be our vision—giving him ample opportunity to bring true light in place of the darkness.

What does it look like to leave this kind of space for Jesus to reveal and cleanse the unhealth in our eyes?

1) First, I would say that God does this work as we read & listen to His Word

- Hebrews 4:12 says 12 For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.
- Years ago I had the privilege of listening to New Testament scholar Gordon Fee at a retreat. I remember him talking about preaching, and he said “the text stands in authority over me – I serve the text.” It wasn't just the words he said, it was the way in which he said them – behind that simple statement was a lifetime of coming under the authority of God's word – allowing it to penetrate his life and judge the thoughts and attitudes of his heart.
- God's Word is not meant to be a burden – it's meant to be a gift-- a great gift that keeps us grounded in what is truly real. God's Spirit uses it as a tool to show us when we begin to drift . . . to clear up the distortions in our vision . . . to show us when we are in danger of making our God and our faith something other than what it truly is.
- As we read and yield to God's word, God's Spirit builds in us a love for the truth. And this love for the truth is the foundation for a life that is filled with light.

2) Secondly, God does this work as we spend time with God's People

- God clarifies our vision through one another, and he speaks to us through the wonderful messiness that is church life.
- One of our values here at Living Waters is authenticity. It's a value because we believe Christian community was intended to be a place where we could learn to be fully ourselves with one another. We believe that church wasn't meant to be neat and tidy—it was meant to be honest and gritty—to be messy – even uncomfortable at times.
- If authenticity isn't happening we miss out on so much of what Jesus intends for us in our life together.
- And we miss out on the chance to learn from the incredible diversity among God's people.
- Because when I come alongside someone else in our community and truly seek to know them I learn from them, and they learn from me. Jesus ends up speaking to me about how my perspective is skewed as I listen to believers who are different from me.
- That's why it's actually a good thing for us to be in life groups with people who are different from us. It clarifies our vision, and builds a humble heart that is willing to listen and learn.

- One of the challenges of the past few years is that we have often been isolated, without a diversity of people to challenge our perspectives. We need to engage meaningfully into community life again – because Jesus clarifies our vision through community.

3) And Finally, God clears the unhealth from our eyes as we spend time with Him.

- There is nothing like silence with Jesus to show us the landscape of our hearts.
- When I think of silence I think of my interior self as a garden. If it's been a while since I've had time sitting with Jesus in silence, the garden is a chaotic mess. Weeds are everywhere and everything needs pruning and tending to. But if I sit with Jesus he begins to bring peace and order like the master gardener He is – weeding and trimming – making things right—bringing about clarity and peace. In that process Jesus clarifies my vision.
- It isn't always an easy process, but I will say that Jesus is my favorite person to show me where I've been wrong, no one else knows me as well, or is as able to speak a true word in a way that is infused with hope. I love that about Jesus. He simply knows how to speak truth in a way that enables me to receive it.
- And so I'd encourage you to let Him in. And maybe the best prayer we can pray in response to today's text is the one we find in Psalm 139:
 - Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. ²⁴ See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. Psalm 139:23-24

I feel like this prayer is an appropriate prayer for us today. Let's pray it as we worship together, let's pray it in the coming days. And as we allow Him to heal our vision, we will be increasingly like the hopeful ending of our Scripture today:

*³⁶ Therefore, if your whole body is **full of light**, and no part of it dark, it will be just as **full of light** as when a lamp shines its light on you."*

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How do you react when found out you were wrong about something? Do you have any stories about when you discovered you were wrong, or when someone called you on something?
2. What does it mean for you to be dependent on Jesus?
3. Look at Hebrews 4:12 and talk about the images used here to describe the Bible. What is this passage saying about the purpose of God's Word? How do you feel about allowing it to play this role in your life?
4. Does being in authentic Christian community help your perceptions to be healthy? Why or why not? What would help community to more fully play this role in your life?
5. We have been using the image of going through the contents of our hearts with Jesus, much like we would empty the contents of a backpack. What do you think Jesus has been pulling out of your backpack? How do you think He is calling you to respond?