

Less Bad is Still Bad

If you've been driving in our community, you've probably seen these speed limit signs that actually light up showing the speed you are driving. The signs have some radar in them. If you're driving fast your speed shows up in big red numbers with the message "slow down." If you're driving within the speed limit, the sign lights up green with the message "thank you." I think those signs kinda help because I know they make me check my speed, and I *want* to get a green sign! Getting a green sign is kinda like throwing a fish to a seal for doing a trick. And I want that little reward. You too?

I don't know any driver who hasn't broken the speed limit. It seems that's something we all feel like we can do and get away with it.

Police officers, when they pull over drivers for speeding, get all kinds of crazy excuses for why the driver is speeding. Here are some actual things drivers have said to cops who pulled them over for speeding:

- "I wasn't speeding, I just got a haircut and it makes me look fast."
- "Oh, I thought the sign I-90 meant the speed limit. Glad you didn't catch me over on SR 210 earlier."
- "Duh, I know I was going fast, I was trying to get the snow off my windshield so I could see where I'm going."
- Police Chief Ted Boyd, stopped a driver who told him that he bought mice to feed his snake and placed the mice inside a cardboard box. The mice chewed through the box and ran around the car. He was in a hurry to get home, before some of the mice crawled up his pant leg.
- One Cop said: "I stopped a lady who was crying when I walked up. I asked what the problem was. She said she had gone shopping for the first time after having a baby and nothing fit

right. I handed her license back and slowly backed away. Nothing good was coming from this."

- And finally, one driver explained his speeding by saying, "Sorry officer. See, my wife left me last week for a policeman, and I was afraid you were that policeman trying to bring her back to me!"

It's funny, isn't it, how we can do something wrong like speeding, but come up with reasons why we think it is OK. We know what the law says, but we ignore the law because we have our own personal standard of what is right and wrong, what is good and what is sin. And of course, our own personal standard always puts us in the right.

This brings us to an important truth that comes from today's Gospel reading. Our sin is so pervasive inside of us, sin has so corrupted everyone of us, that we think we are good and right and better than others. We are deceived into having our own personal standard of right and wrong, good and evil. It puts us always in a favorable light. But the truth is, we are in no position to judge. There is no way we can see clearly enough to even know right from wrong.

In Martin Luther's time lived a man named Desiderius Erasmus. Erasmus is famous for being Martin Luther's target in Luther's book, *The Bondage of the Will*. Luther contended that without God working in us, we have no ability to recognize and practice good while resisting evil. Erasmus is also famous for a quote he included in another 16th-century book, "*Adagiorum Chiliades*," published in 1509. That quote is, "**In the kingdom of the blind, the one-eyed man is king.**"

"It means that if everything is bad, and one thing is less bad, then it's automatically the best.

My father-in-law lost one of his eyes in an accident. He struggled with depth perception. When pouring a liquid into a glass he struggled to line up the pitcher above the glass – at the same distance – so that he didn't spill all over. He struggled when

he drove – especially when he drove at night – to judge how fast cars were coming at him. Now, imagine that everyone else were blind and he was the only person with any eyesight at all. We would *think* he saw perfectly, when of course, he did not.

"In the kingdom of the blind, the one-eyed man is king."

It plays on the idea of 'best' being a relative term. In life, if you were playing a game and the other team forfeited, your team won. But you really didn't do anything. Yes, you still did more than the other kids just because you didn't quit.

We make right and wrong a relative standard and we bend it to our own advantage. Of course, in reality, God's is the only standard that counts. But our sin, works this distortion in us.

David Hume, 18th Century Scottish historian and philosopher, argued that the presence of evil in our world is evidence that God cannot exist. Hume said God must be all-good and all-powerful. So, God could not know and care that there is evil in the world yet at the same time fail to act powerfully in order to stop it coming about. Yet, there is evil in the world. Therefore an all-good, all-powerful, and all-knowing God cannot exist (Lexham Survey of Theology, *The Problem of Evil*).

Hume's reasoning sounds powerful until we remember that we cannot understand God apart from what God reveals Himself. And we are in no way able to judge God's infinite being since we are so small and our understanding is so finite. And whenever we try to judge God, let's remember our inborn bias, that we are by nature enemies of God. Paul writes for us in the Bible in Romans 1:21–23, that by nature, humans ***"... did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things."***

God has given us the Bible as His true Word, and according to the first book in the Bible, Genesis, we were made in God's image and likeness, but then we sinned against God, and the image of God in humanity became corrupted, twisted, and

even *dead* (Ephesians 2:1). What this means for you is that you are able to recognize, to some extent, evil. And you can be a good person, a good citizen by keeping your lawn mowed, your taxes paid, smiling at and saying “hi” to your neighbors, and maybe even never getting pulled over for speeding. That all makes us look good, and we may believe we *ARE* good. But we cannot get rid of evil. Sin is down in us. All of us. People are not born as blank slates, instead our default setting is evil. You never have to teach children to DISobey, but you sure have to teach children to obey. The history of the last 100 years and the current state of America astonish us at the depravity and cruelty human beings are capable of.

We are very much, everyone of us like "the one-eyed man." While thinking we are better off than those around who are blind in both eyes, we are actually no better off at all. We just foolishly believe being only half-blind means we see everything clearly. We *aren't* better than the blind; we just think we are. In fact, if you were fully blind in both eyes, you would know the desperation of your need, but your half-blindness blinds you to the reality of your need.

Do you see the connection to the Pharisees in today's Gospel reading? The Pharisees set up their own rules to mark the line between who is good and who is bad. They already opposed Jesus because Jesus forgave sins and ate with tax collectors and sinners. Opposition to Jesus from the Pharisees went up a couple of notches when they saw that Jesus didn't observe the Sabbath like they did. They said it was '*not lawful*' for his disciples to pluck heads of grain to eat. People *were* allowed to do that in Israel. They didn't have food banks, so that was a way for hungry families to get free food. Deuteronomy (23:25) says, '***If you go into your neighbour's standing grain, you may pluck the ears with your hand, but you may not put a sickle to your neighbour's standing grain***'. For the Pharisees, though, that action was forbidden *on the Sabbath*. They wanted to protect God's law from being broken by

adding laws of their own. They'd identified 39 types of work that weren't to be done, 'including reaping, baking, separating two threads, writing two letters, lighting a fire, and extinguishing a fire'.

Breaking God's law is indeed a serious matter. By adding human commands we convince ourselves that we are good – good in God's eyes, and in our own eyes. We see ourselves as better than others.

When Pharisees accused Jesus and his disciples for breaking the Sabbath by pulling raw grain from the stalks and popping it into their mouths, Jesus pointed out to them their blindness. Jesus gave the example of David and his men who were hungry and on the run from King Saul. David asked Ahimelech the priest for five loaves of bread or whatever was available. But there was no ordinary bread on hand, only the 12 loaves that were laid out each week in the holy place that only the priests were to eat (1 Samuel 21:1–6; Leviticus 24:5–9). Yet because of his need, Ahimelech gave David those most holy loaves of bread. The need to preserve life was greater in importance than the requirement that only priests were to eat the most holy bread.

So Jesus landed His punchline. He said, '***The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath***' (Mark 2:27). The Sabbath command was not a rule to be obeyed as a measuring stick of who is good and who is bad. Instead, God gave the people of Israel the Sabbath command for their benefit. It's a gift. It's grace. It's to be a blessing to people, not an achievement that makes us blindly be deceived that we are better than others or good enough for God.

Then, Jesus gave them the stinger: Since the Sabbath was made for man, the Son of Man who is representative of all humanity, who will carry the sin of all humanity on Him to the cross, this Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath. He's Lord of the Sabbath also because in addition to Jesus being the Son of Man, He is also the Son of God and as God He is the One who gave the Sabbath command.

Then to *PROVE* that He is true God and Lord of the Sabbath, Jesus did something ONLY God can do. He healed the man with a withered hand. Jesus said, ***“Stretch out your hand.”*** And by the sheer power of His Word with authority, the man’s hand was healed. Right in front of their very eyes.

This was *another* act of grace, of kindness Jesus did. You see, Jesus isn’t all about rule keeping to prove how good we are. We aren’t good. Instead, Jesus is all about grace, forgiveness, and blessing people He loves so dearly – like you, too.

The Pharisees saw Jesus do a miracle of healing that ONLY God can do. They should have recognized immediately that Jesus is God before them. They should have listened to Jesus.

Instead, what did they do? These Pharisees who thought they themselves were better than others, good in God’s eyes, and in their own, ***“the Pharisees went out and immediately held counsel with the Herodians against Him [Jesus] how to destroy Him.”*** *Mark 3: 6* They plotted to murder Jesus. These people who are good in their own eyes plot to do something that is *clearly* against God’s law. They see themselves as good but they plot to do evil. They are the one-eyed man.

The same is true today. Democrats think Republicans are ignorant. And Republicans think Democrats are evil. Those who try to be carbon neutral condemn those who drive pick-ups, and those who don’t care about carbon emissions judge those who do as being responsible for high prices. Those who advocate for transgender rights accuse those who don’t as being transphobic, while others accuse transgender advocates for ruining women’s sports. On, and on, and on it goes. Everyone is right in their own eyes, judging others. And in our time many judge God to be irrelevant when God doesn’t agree with their views. We are all blind. None are capable of clearly seeing the full extent of the evil in our hearts. We need God to show us our depravity.

And when He does, when we truly listen to His evaluation of our sin, we fall on our knees in humble repentance before the gracious Lord of the Sabbath.

Jesus is the One who smiles when the disciples eat, when the hungry are fed, when life is preserved. Jesus is the One who has given us Commands for our good, for your blessing, not for a way to prove yourself. Jesus is the Lord of the Sabbath who heals withered hands, and heals withered hearts like yours. He is true God who loves, and loves you so much that He would willingly carry all your wrongs, all your selfish judgements of others, all your self-righteous thinking – and Jesus took it all on Himself, paying for the whole blind, stinking lot, with His pure, innocent life blood. And in another gift of grace and blessing, Jesus offers you complete forgiveness, heaven to come, and the capacity to begin to truly love one another now.

All of us need Jesus. And He has more than enough grace for everyone. He simply calls you to admit your need and come.

True sight is keeping your eyes on Jesus alone. Trust His Word alone. Trust His grace for you alone.

Oh, and stop thinking is OK to drive over the speed limit. Slow down and have a nice day.

Amen.