

The Dot

Once upon a time a professor gave his students a pop-quiz. They all cried out: "This is unfair!.....We are not prepared!....We need time to study." The professor passed out the quiz papers face down. When they turned the page over they found it was blank except for one black dot at the center. The professor instructed his students to write about what they saw on the page. The professor read each student's answer aloud. Without exception, each response tried to explain why the dot was in the center of the page.

The professor made the following reflections on their responses. Their answers focused solely on the dot. He called his students to see that dot at the center of the page mirrors our lives. The dot, he explained, stands for the challenges we all face: health concerns, employment issues, and the complications and disappointments we experience in relationships with family and friends. We seem to naturally focus on the problems and challenges in our lives. He argued that when we focus on problems, our minds are polluted and we become blind to a reality. We miss the blank part of the page. When we focus on the blank parts of the page we see that the problems we face, the dark spots, are very small when compared to all the blessings we have in our lives. He admonished his class to: "Take your eyes away from the black dots of your life. Enjoy each one of your blessings each moment that life gives you. Be happy and live a life full of love."

The professor is right; we do tend to focus on our problems. When our problems become the focus of our thoughts, we certainly do become blind to our blessings and possibilities. It is also true that when we focus on our problems, it is impossible to experience happiness in life and to be able to effectively reach out to others.

Focus is the key issue here. You can change your focus from your problems to your blessings. When we focus on our blessings we can feel good and can relate to others in a loving way. The problem with the professor's advice is that shifting our focus to our blessings doesn't solve our problems. Something negative will inevitably happen to us and our focus will invariably shift back to our problems and we find ourselves overwhelmed by our problems once again. Jesus calls for a different focus.

First, he calls us to focus on our problems. We have to admit that we cannot solve most of them and have to look to someone outside ourselves to give us help. We have to hear Jesus say to us: "*Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.*" (Matthew 11:28-30)

Second, Jesus, calls us to focus on him, to take his yoke. To take his yoke is to focus on his Gospel, on God's word. God's word reveals that we can see Jesus is in our problems. The Gospel reveals that Jesus was tortured and crucified. He therefore understands our illness, physical pain, suffering and death. The Gospel also reveals that Jesus was tempted by every human temptation and overcame them. His disciples, those closest to him, denied they knew him, betrayed him and abandoned him. He was wrongly accused, arrested and convicted of a crime by religious and political authorities. He was wrongly executed. He understands the pain and suffering that we experience when those we love disappoint us and authority figures mistreat us. Yet, the Gospel reveals that Jesus forgave those who hurt him and reached out to mend broken relationships. He calls us to do the same.

Third, Jesus calls us to focus on following him. He promises that those who focus on the words of Gospel, on God's word, will be changed. They will have faith and trust in Jesus and God's word. The Gospel calls us to reach out to Jesus for mercy and healing. Jesus may miraculously heal our ills and/or give us the grace to endure the pain and suffering and overcome our illness. Jesus will convince us we are sinners and that all of our sins are against God. He will convince us that we must be forgiven by God and that God forgives us of our sins because of Jesus' suffering, death and resurrection. Jesus will permit us to see our fault and our part in creating the breakdown of relationships with employers, family members and friends and desire their forgiveness for the hurt we caused. He will give us the grace to forgive those who have wronged us. Jesus promises he will go ahead of us to open hearts and minds so that true reconciliation can occur.

We meet for worship at 9:00 and 10:30 on Sunday mornings. We focus on our troubles, on Jesus and on following him. Why don't you join us? Those forgiven by and reconciled to God through Jesus Christ are given a clean slate. Perhaps, if you focus with us, you will come to see your life as a blank page that can be filled with paragraphs peppered with acts of forgiveness, love, mercy and grace.

Yours in Christ,
Pastor Ed Skutshek