

Looking Into The Mirror

(Preached by Cheryl Williams at Footscray Baptist, September 1st, 2024 - James 1:17-27)

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Image is part of series 'Reflections of the past' by Tom Hussey

The picture above comes from a project by photographer Tom Hussey called Reflections of the Past. As you can see it depicts an older person looking in the mirror and seeing a much younger image of themselves. My cousin is a photographer, and she has done this with photos of my uncle and aunt.

Perhaps you have been to carnival and stood in front of a house of mirrors that distort your image – you become very tall and thin or short and wide. These mirrors are curved in order to distort your reflection and make you appear very different.

Mirrors are very important, think about driving and how useful your rear-view vision mirror is. They are used in telescopes, lasers, cameras and periscopes.

Mirrors have been used forever, probably the first one was a pool of water. Stone, metal and glass have been used since the beginning of time.

I am sure you know the Greek myth about Narcissus. Lamenting an unhappy love affair, he is in the woods and stops to drink from a clear pool of water. As he does, he sees an image in the water, an image he falls in love with, it was of course his own reflection. The image would disappear if he stirred the water. So entranced by the image (his own image) he forgets everything, even to eat and dies beside that pool of water.

Superstition tells us that it will give us seven years bad luck if we break a mirror.

The wicked queen asks everyday “Mirror, Mirror on the wall, who's the fairest of them all?” The mirror never lies and tells her it is Snow White.

A mirror reflects an image.

What do you see when you look in the mirror? Maybe you don't even look. A good mirror in good light will reveal everything. Every blemish and flaw, every wrinkle and grey hair.

James has something to say to us about mirrors. He warns us to not be people who look in the mirror and then turn away and forget what they have seen.

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Is this a warning to our narcissistic tendencies? Or perhaps to our carelessness, or maybe to our desire to only look at the superficial? Perhaps to our desire to attempt to hide from our true selves?

Looking in a mirror will be risky as we will need to confront what we see.

What do you see in the mirror – a scowling face, angry and frustrated or one that is at peace?

Do you see a gentle face that is ready to listen, ready to offer compassion to those in distress? Do you see a face that is willing to care, a face ready to jump into action and share God's love? Do you see a generous face?

James is using the idea of a mirror as a metaphor.

I think we are being invited to examine who we are and who we are becoming. Perhaps for us it might be a vehicle for self-awareness, so instead of thinking about the physical attributes we see in the mirror I wonder what other attributes we might see.

James tells us not to forget what we see and invites us to examine what we do see.

Now, I wonder if we looked into the mirror what we would see if the image reflected back to us was that of Christ. What would we see then?

Would we see compassion? Perhaps a desire that all be treated equally? Perhaps a desire that all know they are forgiven and free? Perhaps a deep love and compassion for all creation? Perhaps an arm outstretched saying, come to me, come and rest a while? Perhaps an invitation to come and learn his ways? Perhaps we see peace? Perhaps we see a face that says to us I see your potential and I want you to live into that.

Perhaps that image of Christ in the mirror says to you - I see your fear and I have overcome that for you, I see your tiredness but I offer you rest and will give you all that will sustain you, I see your uncertainty listen to my word and clarity will come, I see your low self-esteem but I am here to remind you of your true value, that you are the beloved of God.

We are called to mirror Christ. James as always helps us understand what that will look like. He helps us to understand what we need to reflect back to the world. James talks about us becoming a kind of first fruits of all creation, the first fruits who reflect the image of God in whose image we were made.

Therefore, as God is generous, we shall also be generous, giving to others without fear or favour.

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We will ground ourselves in the word of his truth, it will be God's view of the world we will stand in, not the world's view of itself.

We will listen first and speak last. We will set aside our opinions and truly listen to the other.

We will bridle our tongue, that is we will be careful with our words and ensure they are not hurtful, that they don't undermine, that they don't destroy another's self-esteem. Instead, they will be used to encourage, to build up each other and not cause division.

We will be slow to anger. We will think about how our anger affects others before we unleash it on the world.

We will be doers of the word we have received. That is, we will practice what we preach and what we believe.

We will persevere even when the going gets tough.

We will value freedom, freedom for all. Freedom to live without fear, freedom to live with peace and justice.

We will practice care and compassion for the vulnerable and invisible in our society, in James' day they were the widow and the orphan. In our day it would be the homeless, the transgender person, the asylum seeker, the poor.

Living like this will mean taking some risks, having humility and having a degree of self-awareness. It means having a good hard look at ourselves. It will mean taking seriously the word of God.

God will enable us to do all these things if we remember he forms us by His word of truth. It is all these things we see in the Christ mirror. All this is possible because he holds us, his love enfolds us.

So, next time you look in the mirror will you see the first fruits of God's creation?