

How we see is what we see

(Sermon by Cheryl Williams, preached at Footscray Baptist on March 15th, 2026 – John 9:1-41)

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In the last few months, I have had to deal with serious problems with my eyes requiring laser treatment. This is not my first experience with needing eye treatment, having had eye surgery when I was 7 years old. This time was different though, as I had to confront the reality that losing some, or all of my sight was a possibility. (Treatment has been successful, so all is good). What would I do for work? How would I go places as I would no longer be able to drive? How could I cook, clean, read and do craft work – all things that are really important to me? My father also had a similar experience, when he was waiting to have the retina reattached in one of his eyes, again that treatment was successful. During this recent laser treatment, I was unable to really see for a few hours after the treatment and things were hazy for a day or so. So, I started to think about what losing your sight might be like. Sight is really important, but it is not the only way we understand the world around us.

In our story today we have a story about seeing. In 41 verses there are 33 references to sight, seeing, eyes and being blind. Walking along Jesus and his disciples come upon a blind man begging. The disciples ask who sinned – he or his parents, as people back then thought disability was caused by sin. Jesus says, just watch and see, and spitting on the ground makes mud which he spreads on the man's eye and tells him then to go and wash and he comes back able to see.

Those who knew the man wondered if he indeed was the same man who used to sit and beg. He kept saying he was. They want to know how he could now see, he told them the story of what Jesus had done.

They then brought the Pharisees to see him, their issue was he had healed the man on the Sabbath and concluded he must not be from God and called Jesus a sinner. They too asked the blind man about the healing. He called his healer a prophet. The man was not believed, so they went and checked with his parents. The parents were scared they would be throw out of the synagogue, so they only confirmed who the man was, but now how he was healed, so told them to go and ask him. They go back to him and suggest Jesus was a sinner. The blind man refuses to get into this argument, and simply says that all he knows is that he can now see, and wonders if they too want to follow him, amazed that they didn't understand who Jesus was. They then drive him out of the synagogue (the very thing his parents feared).

Jesus hears about this and goes to the man and just like he did with the women last week reveals to him just who he is (Son of Man) – you have seen him and he is the one speaking to you. Just like the woman last week he believes and worships him.

Then Jesus offers a real sting in the tail to those listening – Jesus wasn't there to judge but so people who do not see can see and those who think they see become blind. The Pharisees are left wondering if they are blind.

I want to argue today, that this story, suggests that **the way** you see influences what you see. Let me explain what I mean with reference to all the characters in this story,

¹ Quote by Richard Rohr

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but first an example from the law. The classic legal example is that of witnesses to a car accident – depending on where you were in relation to the accident, your personality, what else you were doing, all will influence what you see – many witnesses will have slightly different recollections of the incident.

First, we have the disciples. Rather than seeing the blind man and initially showing compassion, the first thing they ask is about sin. Of course that was a normal question back then, but their view of this man is formed by an understanding of sinfulness. They see the sin first, before the person. Note, Jesus will have nothing to do with this understanding.

Second, the parents of the man born blind. They view the world through fear. They are not prepared to stand up for Jesus because of what might happen to them in their society. So, they shift responsibility for the answer to the Pharisee's question back to their son.

Third, the religious people. They have already made up their minds that Jesus cannot be from God, that rather he is a sinner. They only see that Jesus healed on the Sabbath and broke the rules, rather than seeing he has brought new life to this man. Not only are their questions about the sinfulness of the blind man, but Jesus too is also called a sinner.

Fourth, the blind man himself. He begins to see the world differently. First, he only knows himself to be an outsider forced to beg and not shown compassion by his community. Meeting Jesus helps him see the world differently – not only does he physically start to see, but he cannot see why it is so hard to understand that Jesus must have come from God, he becomes a believer and follower of Jesus. His eyes are opened in more ways than one.

Finally, Jesus. Jesus sees a man in need and only looks upon him with compassion. He looks beyond this person's disability and only sees an opportunity to make a difference. He also can see straight threw the Pharisees and how they are trying to catch both Jesus and the blind man out. He can see they have already made up their mind about both of them.

How we view the world will dictate how we see the world. If we think it is a dangerous place, we will see danger at every corner. If we think all is hopeless, we will only see hopeless situations. If we think people are bad then we will see people as lazy, mean, out to get us rather than people who have been down on their luck, let down by others, as people who need compassion and a break.

Just think about world politics at the moment. The president of the USA sees everything as a **deal** and that is how he acts, that is how conducts his diplomacy, doing all he can to close the deal and what is the deal – power, land and likely oil. How he sees is what he sees and how he acts.

How we see is what we see. How we see God is how we see. How we see is what we see and how we live. Will you choose to see beauty, to see the need of others, to see glimpses of hope, to see mercy and to see peace?

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Remember the old song ‘Day by Day’, may the refrain guide you in the days ahead –
Day by day
Oh dear Lord
Three things I pray
To see thee more clearly
Love thee more dearly
Follow thee more nearly
Day by day