

New Eyes  
John 9: 1-41  
March 30, 2014

*This sermon was preached by Pastor Kurt Jacobson at Trinity Lutheran Church, Eau Claire, WI .*

The bible reading from John about Jesus this day is the story of Jesus healing a man who had been blind from birth. It's a biblical account with a good dose of drama, intrigue, conflict and beauty. It's also an entire chapter long. So instead of numbing you with my simply reading it– you're going to watch it. But first a little introduction.

This chapter of the Bible divides like a three-act play:

**Act 1** Cast: Disciples and Jesus. The disciples are walking down the street and notice a blind beggar. They ask: "Jesus, who sinned and caused this man to be blind, the man himself or his parents? It was common to blame blindness on some sin in those days. Jesus response: *"Neither. His blindness gives opportunity for God's works to be revealed in him. I am the light of the world."* Exit Disciples.

**Act 2** Enter Blind man. Without any request by the man, Jesus speaks to him, applies "mud made with saliva" over his eyes and tells him to go wash in the pool of Siloam. It is the Sabbath day – when Jewish law required that no one was to work. Exit Jesus.

**Act 3** Enter Neighbors and Village people

The man washes the mud off his eyes and he can see! Those who witness ask how this happened? The man once blind says "Jesus did it." The neighbors are unsure this is really the guy once blind.

The Pharisees, the religious authorities of the day, are also unsure if this is really the man who had been blind. They question the man's parents and the man himself. The result leads to the man once blind being thrown out of the synagogue.

**Conclusion:** Enter Jesus. He seeks out the healed man and teaches that he came to bring sight to the blind and to reveal the blindness of those who think they see.

Watch John 9: 1-14 here <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6LR0wXe8XBU>

Dear Friends:

My beautiful, active 89 year old mother is struggling with her eyesight. One eye doesn't work at all due to a failed retinal procedure a few years ago. The other eye has a retinal problem also, yet so far basic vision is stabilized by periodic injections. But now a cataract has developed in that eye further compromising her ability to see. My brother is an optometrist living in the same town and with his expertise and an outstanding ophthalmologist, she is in good hands. They've decided she can have the cataract removed and likely regain better vision. But this also raises the risk that the retinal issue could be a complication which could result in further loss of vision. Such an outcome would dramatically change my mom's life and my 93 year old father who is heavily dependent upon her.

My mom, despite these eye problems, (and hearing problems too) chooses to be a positive person. She reads extensively each day with an enormous magnifying glass. She's visits "old people" in the nursing home regularly. She goes to Bible Study and to worship every Sunday – and though she cannot see the screen, the hymnal or the bulletin, and doesn't always hear very well, she perceives all the goodness connected to worship and the community of faith. Her life, its challenges and concerns about eyesight are cushioned and encouraged by a deep faith in Jesus – who she knows as the Light of the World.

My mom, bless her heart, has the ability to perceive lots of good around her, despite the challenges. She fits the quote by Irving Berlin: “*Life is 10 percent what you make it and 90 percent how you take it.*” She also chooses to live out a truth found in this story of the blind man – that it’s a choice to see that Jesus is God, the Light of the world who comes for all people.

This biblical account shows the difference between how people’s perceptions result in very different views. The village people couldn’t believe their eyes that the miraculously seeing man was the same blind beggar they had passed on the street for years. The Pharisees, those upright, rule-keeping religious leaders couldn’t bear the man’s story of how Jesus healed him with some spit-moistened mud.

Perception makes all the difference in this miracle story. It makes a huge difference in our lives, too. Perception (from the Latin *percipio*) is organizing and identifying information gained through our five senses in order to understand the world around us. How we interpret what we gain through our senses determines our actions and responses, even our beliefs.

Think about how perception impacts human life. We can look at the poor and see lazy people who refuse to work, or we can see victims of circumstance or poor choices, or we can see decent human beings making the most of tough situations.

We can look at climate science and see a natural cycle which has just happened to come upon us now or we can see human actions putting our planet under pressure and changing its climate.

We can look at so many other things: issues of wealth and income inequality, consumption, energy, immigration, health care, sexuality, abortion, and capital punishment and every person’s perception of such issues can be different.

In the bible story, the Pharisees and some of the blind man’s neighbors choose one perception of his miraculous healing. At first, they refuse to believe it’s really the blind beggar they had ignored for years. In doing so, they choose to remain blind to the reality of Jesus’ power to heal as the Light of the World.

In our daily lives we all make choices (consciously or subconsciously) about what we will see and what we won’t. It’s tempting to choose not to see the suffering and injustice in our world – to switch off the news, and to ignore reports of war, famine, genocide. It’s tempting to avoid seeing certain people, allowing them to be faceless, removing their need and struggle from our thoughts. It’s tempting to avoid seeing some validity in those with whom we disagree, instead of seeing them as just plain wrong. It’s tempting to avoid seeing our money’s power for making a difference in the lives of others – and rather choose to believe “I’m only one person and so I couldn’t do much anyway.”

But, if we have perceived Jesus as the Light of the World, truly God, then our seeing will be informed by God’s perspective where the last are first, the greatest are the least, and where everyone has merit and worth.

The blind man used his newly functioning eyes to see Jesus as the Light and to worship Him. If we are to follow Him into a world of justice, we must necessarily live our lives with the Christ-like mission of helping others to see, and be blessed, by the extravagantly good, inclusive and healing love made known in Jesus.

*Thank you, God, for having a perception of us that isn’t limited to five senses. Thank for seeing us very differently than we see ourselves. Even when we are isolated in our own shame or regrets, entrenched in our own perceptions, You see in us the giftedness and the divine likeness which you have freely placed in us. Thank you for how you see us, God. Reorient our perception of You –and give us new eyes to see ourselves and others the way you do. Amen.*