

“Conversations on the Way to the Cross: The Man Born”

Mary Henderson Bowman

Date: March 10, 2024



How do we see the way God wants us to see?
How do we recognize the movements of God?

These are the questions being asked in our reading this morning.

And these questions are complicated because the Scripture implies that . . .

All of us are blind in some way.

Often, we are blind to things about ourselves.
Often, we are blind to the truth of something.
And often we are blind to the ways of God.

All of us are blind in some way.

And I would argue that very few of us recognize that we have a tendency to blindness.

One of the reasons that we find it difficult to see clearly is because we always see things from our own perspective.

“We see things not the way things are, but the way that we are.”¹

“We see things not the way things are, but the way that we are.”

We see things in a way that make sense to us. We think we are seeing things clearly, but we are often finding stories and ideas that support the way we see.

Our upcoming Willard Lecturer, Brian McLaren hosts a podcast called “Learning How to See.” McLaren is the first to acknowledge that it is very difficult to see things clearly, and one of the reasons is something called confirmation bias.

Confirmation bias is the human tendency to be drawn to ideas and stories that support our own positions.

One of McLaren’s guests explained it this way — “We see the things we want to see, the things that confirm our assumptions and our preferred way of looking at the world. “We’re actually looking for the story that confirms what’s in our minds. . . . not for the story that changes our mind.”²

¹ Attributed to Thomas Aquinas, through Jacqui Lewis, “Why We Can’t See” podcast with Brian McLaren *Learning How to See*

² Jacqui Lewis, “Why We Can’t See” podcast with Brian McLaren *Learning How to See*

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Our New Testament reading³ is an object lesson in confirmation bias.

Our story this morning began with an incredibly dramatic event! An honest to goodness miracle no less!

Jesus brings sight to a man who has never seen before. It is the only time that such a healing is described in the gospels. This is a remarkable event!

And yet, the miracle is barely finished when people begin to try to figure out just what happened and how to understand it.

The neighbors look at the man born blind . . . and they are skeptical. They do not seem to have the gift of recognition and appreciation. They are not able to even recognize the man whom they have long known.

We can't help notice with a sense of sadness that there was no wonder, no celebration, no amazement, no praise at this incredible healing.

The neighbors eventually take their question to the Pharisees, who are the religious leaders of the day. The Pharisees look at the man and try to make sense of what has happened in the context of what they already know.

Like the neighbors, the Pharisees are skeptical. Nothing about what has happened to the blind man fits in their understanding of things.

We watch the Pharisees doing a kind of mental gymnastics to make the miracle fit into what has been their understanding of God.

When the man born blind offers a different way to see what has happened, the Pharisees become defensive and abusive. In the end, they excommunicate the man from the synagogue and his community in all of the important ways.

Sadly, the Pharisees chose maintaining the status quo of their thoughts over the care of the man.

This story feels achingly modern.

The question throughout the story is how do we see the way God sees?

How do we open ourselves to the ways of God?

How do we recognize God at work?

The neighbors and the Pharisees are stuck and unwilling to open themselves to a new recognition, a new understanding.

The exception in the story is the man born blind.

³ John 9:1-41

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This man is not just given the gift of vision, but it is a different kind of vision than those around him.

The theologian Richard Rohr describes this type of vision this way — “it is a kind of seeing that is much more than looking because it includes recognizing and appreciating.”⁴

Richard Rohr gives a word to this type of seeing . . . “it is called contemplation. And contemplation does not tell us what to see but teaches us how to see what we behold.”⁵

The man born blind’s recognition does not come all at once.
And the man’s recognition is significantly aided by Jesus.
This should not surprise us.
God is always interested in our seeing the way God sees.
And God is both a healer and a revealer.

The man’s path toward seeing began with a healing, but it concluded with a revealing.

When the man was first asked who healed him, the man simply described Jesus as a man.
The next time the man is asked, he describes Jesus as a prophet.
And finally Jesus is known to him as the Son of Man.

We can hear the seeing beyond looking.
It is the man’s openness and desire to truly know that leads him to the deepest recognition.
The man born blind stands up for Jesus and is then banished from the synagogue.
And it is in that moment that Jesus comes and finds the man.
Jesus does not forsake us even when others do.

God does not want us to remain blind and so God pursues us in God’s perfect timing with an invitation to see something differently.

This is the challenge for us in the times that we are stuck . . .
Perhaps it is a relationship or a situation at work that feels stuck . . . and so we ask “Lord, what is it You want me to see in this situation? What is it that You want me to recognize?”

Perhaps we ourselves are stuck in some way . . . and so we ask, “Lord, help me to see and recognize what I need to in order to get unstuck.”

Open Thou Mine Eyes⁶, O Lord!

⁴ Richard Rohr, “The Medicant,” February 2024.

⁵ Richard Rohr, “The Medicant,” February 2024.

⁶ The title of our opening music.