

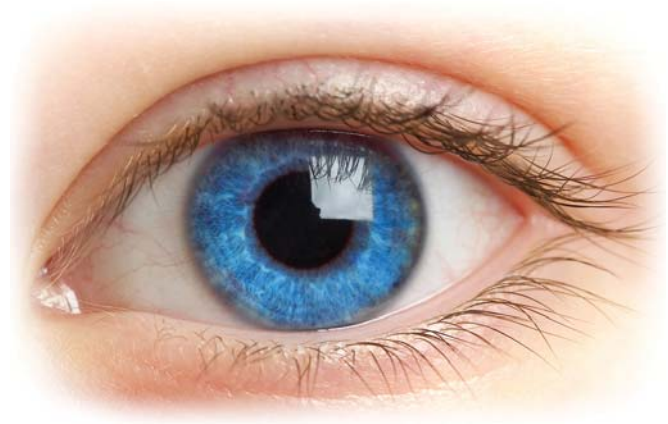


Journey into Seeing

Week 1: 1 March 2009

Theme of the Week

People whose spiritual journeys were changed by the encounter with Jesus.



STARTING OUT

Look around!

The spiritual journey that takes us through Lent and into Easter begins with the gift of seeing. In God's creation, most creatures have eyes and many have eyes especially equipped to see the world around them in ways which help them survive. We talk about having 'the eyes of a hawk' or being 'eagle-eyed'. Predators like cats have forward facing eyes to let them focus sharply on what they are hoping to have for dinner. Prey animals like mice have eyes on the sides of their heads letting them see much more of their surroundings and what might be coming for them. Bees see colours we cannot and are attracted by the brilliance of what might seem to us rather boring flowers. So why have we got eyes and what are we supposed to see with them?

As spiritual, reflective beings, one of the things we have the capacity to see, if we look properly, is evidence of God at work in the world. The Bible tells us of many people who were amazed by direct evidence of God's activity. We have the capacity to notice what the world around us is like; we can take in what is unusual or different and try to make sense of it. We are equipped to see and appreciate beauty and to be distressed by ugliness. We notice if the neighbourhood seems to have declined; but we might also go out and enjoy a new building or park or regenerated area. In general we seek out things which give us pleasure and suggest to us that life is good; we lament those things we see around us or on TV which show us the terrible state of our world where things go wrong.

The trouble is, it is easy to become complacent or lazy and not use the gift of sight properly. We can become so used to seeing the things that we take for granted that we don't notice them until they're not there any more. We can get used to ugliness, brokenness and suffering, and forget that it is sending us a challenge and a message that the world around us could and should be better than this.

**A million arrows, I
the target, where the lines meet
and are knotted**

Archbishop Rowan Williams



Poem by kind permission of the Archbishop of Canterbury; © Rowan Williams 2009

In Lent, as we look forward to focussing our thoughts on God and what he has done through his Son Jesus Christ, we need to sharpen our vision. We need to pay attention to what we see all around us and we need to learn how to see differently. We can miss what God is doing in the creation all around us and fail to see the signs the Holy Spirit leaves us everywhere. We fail Jesus and his call to us by not picking up on these signs and sharing them with others.

Look at the picture



Questions

- How does this picture make you feel?
- What does this picture say about human beings? Our world?
- What do you think God might be telling us through this picture?

An illegal rubbish dump

Video

Digital photography artist, Chris Jordan looks at issues of environment and consumption in a different way. See the extra material on www.sensemakingfaith.org.uk.

GOING DEEPER

Thinking about being blind

Suppose we can't see at all? What is it like to be blind from birth or to become blind? For sighted people, it can be difficult to conceive, not least because so much of daily life is built on the assumption that we can see, even if it is dark. The Bible too, is full of 'sighted' language. Yet many of us, after all, will have the experience of failing sight as we grow older and may not see as clearly or sharply as we do now or once did. What do we learn from the experience of blind people about loss or absence of sight and how do we encounter God in those conditions?





A story

When a blind church organist in Norfolk was reading the lesson at the Christmas carol service from Braille, he stopped and apologised that he was reading slowly 'because his hands were too cold'.



Activity

Fire safety officers sometimes tell us to think about how we would get out of our homes if it was dark and everywhere around us was smoky. It's known that sighted people who suddenly have to get around in pitch darkness may become disoriented and sometimes can't find their way even in places they know very well. So it's important in an emergency to have a clear idea of where you're going and what obstacles might be in the way.

Imagine now that you are in your home at night and there is a power cut. You need to find a torch and/or some candles or other source of light in pitch darkness. Do you know where to find them? Can you picture those places clearly? How will you find your way? Think about what landmarks you would search for with your other senses and how you would know where you were. What hazards might be around? Do you know how many stairs you have, or exactly where your door handles are?

Response

- What would you do if you got lost or disoriented in the dark?
- What is it like not to have the use of your eyes?





MOVING ON

Seeing scripture differently

This is a Bible Study on the main passage from the Radio 4 programme for Lent 1 but offered from a different perspective. You can look at the passage on your own or adapt it for a role play in a group.

Mark 10.46-52

I had been sitting by the roadside outside Jericho all day wrapped in my outer garment against the dust and the dirt as the people and animals came and went, holding out my hands and begging for alms. The sun was hot on my face and my mouth was dry. I was one of a group of beggars hoping for some charity from those coming in and out of the town of Jericho in the business of trading and meeting. Because I could not see, I strained my ears for news and stories and picked up little things that people often miss. Although I was grateful for whatever was pressed into my palm or dropped into my cup, I was eager too to know more about the world around me, news from afar.

Jericho was buzzing because somebody extraordinary was in town. There was a crowd all talking among themselves and hoping to get close to the spectacle. I could feel the excitement, curiosity, tension, even fear. This man was a controversial figure. People were saying that he performed signs and wonders, that he could heal, that he was here to overthrow the old regime and make us holy once again, that he was certain to bring trouble and get himself killed as a revolutionary. Sitting day after day, dependent on the kindness and charity of strangers, I felt hope and desire flame in me, to see this holy one of God and to be part of his following. But I was blind. I would never see him, never be able to follow him anywhere, never do anything to help his cause. Yet the idea burned in me: if I could see, then my eyes would look upon the person the prophets spoke of, the Messiah.

The murmurs around me swelled to excited clamour. People gathered around us, the beggars, their clothes swishing in my face, dust getting into my mouth. 'He's coming! He's coming!' they told each other excitedly. 'It is Jesus, Jesus from Nazareth'. I knew then that Jesus would go right by me, with all his followers and the crowd going after them, to see what he would do next. Jesus would never notice me, sitting on the ground and obscured by all the people. He was as blind to me as I was to him.

So I did the only thing I could. I shouted as loudly as I could manage: 'Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!' That did it. Immediately those in the crowd rounded on me hissing 'Shut up! Shut up! You can't call him that!' For I had named him the Messiah by calling him Son of David. Somebody kicked me and pushed me roughly. They wanted me to stay out of sight. After all, I was a beggar, a nobody. But I wasn't going to give up so I shouted out to him even more loudly 'Son of David, have mercy on me!' Some people around me were panicking and saying over me 'He's mad! Don't take any notice.' But suddenly people were standing still. Something was happening. The voices changed. Someone was putting their hands under my





elbows and helping me up, saying 'He wants you. Go to him.' I couldn't believe it. I had been crouched in a corner, ignored and told to be quiet, but now I was standing up and I could feel the eyes of everyone on me. Suddenly everyone was looking at me, the blind man.

They brought me to Jesus who said to me 'What do you want me to do for you?' It was odd the fact that he said it like that, like I was in charge and he was my servant. I said at once that I wanted to be able to see again, to look on him and see my salvation. Jesus seemed to understand that I wanted so much more than just to be able to use my eyes. I wanted to be made complete, to be whole and to be capable of following him and serving him. He touched my eyes with his fingers and said 'your faith has made you whole'. I was able to see again, suddenly the world cleared and was focussed and I was filled with gratitude and the desire to praise the goodness and mercy of God. So I did what anyone would do, having been given such a gift, I followed Jesus and told my story to others.

Some questions to think about

- Why did Jesus respond to Bartimaeus?
- What do you think Jesus meant by 'your faith has made you whole'?
- What other people can you think of in scripture who are in danger of being 'overlooked' but noticed by Jesus? Why does he notice them?

MOVING INTO LENT

The sights of the desert

When Jesus went out into the wilderness what did he see? The Judean Desert is a relatively small area bordered by the mountains of Judea to the west and by the Dead Sea to the East. It has a varied geography of mountains, sharp cliffs crossed by canyons and riverbeds, and with areas of plateau. In this rugged landscape it was possible to live in the many caves and hiding places, and rebels and outcasts often hid out in the wilder places. Other people lived in the desert or moved around and through it, often herding animals or bringing items to trade in the towns.

But it was also a place where Jesus could leave town buildings and crowded human activities behind and see the desert people in the context of the shapes of the natural world and the effects of weather. It was a place where he could look at the natural world of his Father's creation and see how plants and small animals made a living even in harsh conditions. He could appreciate how important water was and the way the land is shaped and changed by the presence of water. In this place there was less to distract him from being himself before God and he would most likely have been forcibly reminded of the long history of the wanderings of the people of Israel. It is no accident that we are told he spent 40 days there, when the people of Israel are said to have wandered for 40 years.





**A Roman camp
near Masada,
Judean Desert,
Israel**

We may imagine that Jesus sought out this region in order to let the environment and its people shape his thoughts as he meditated on God's will. It was a place where he could more easily focus his attention completely on God without distraction or interruption. What he saw recalled his mind to his purpose - how to serve God completely and to do God's will as his Son.

Some questions to think about

- What distractions get in the way of paying attention closely to God?
- What places in your life offer you a 'desert' where you are less distracted from focussing on God?
- What are the features of your 'desert' and how do they help you clear your mind, think clearly, meditate or pray?
- What do you think Jesus saw when he went into the desert and what did the sights mean to him?

RESTING ON THE WAY

Prayer and reflection

Psalm 121.1

*I lift up my eyes to the hills –
From where will my help come?
My help comes from the Lord
Who made heaven and earth.*





A prayer from Hebrews 13.20-1

*Now may the God of Peace,
Who brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus,
The great shepherd of the sheep,
By the blood of the eternal covenant,
Make you complete in everything good
So that you may do his will,
Working among us that which is pleasing in his sight,
Through Jesus Christ to whom be the glory for ever and ever*

Where else can this journey take me?

There is more material to explore in the book *Sense Making Faith* in the 'Journey into Seeing' chapter and you can explore further journeys and ideas in the Explore section of www.spiritualjourneys.org.uk in the section called 'See'. *Sense Making Faith* offers a broader exploration of the sense of sight, the spiritual worlds and journeys of those without sight and what others outside the Christian faith think of using what they see to find God.

Look at Professor John Hull's *On Sight and Insight, a Journey into the World of Blindness*, Oxford, One World Books 1997 and *In the Beginning there was Darkness, a Blind Person's Conversations with the Bible*, SCM 2001.

March 1st is also St David's Day. For more on St David you can look at the resource for St David's Day on www.sensemakingfaith.org.uk.

The Daily Service on Radio 4, from 2 - 5 March, offers more readings and reflections for you to listen to about people whose spiritual journeys were changed by the encounter with Jesus.

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