

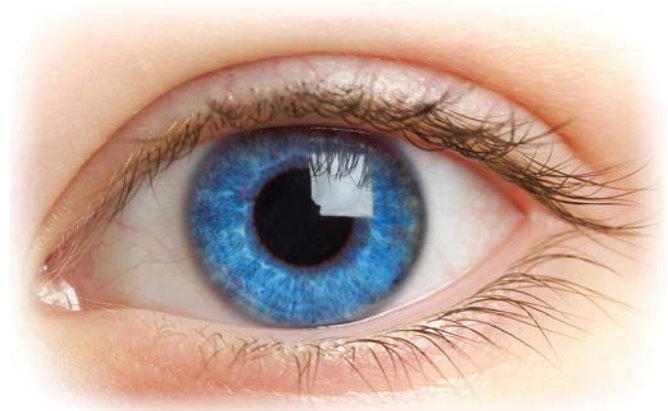


Journey into Seeing

Week 1a: 1 March 2009

Theme of the Week

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



STARTING OUT

In the footsteps of St David

On St David's Day, what sorts of images come to mind? Red Dragons, yellow daffodils, green leeks? How often have you seen something funny, beautiful, or extraordinary, and said 'I wish I had a camera'? Some photographers carry a camera everywhere they go so that they will always be able to capture an arresting or unusual image and some say that it reminds them to look at the world around them more closely and attentively.

So, on St David's Day, what happens if we look a bit more at what is behind the early daffodils and the green leeks? Who was St David and why is he important to Wales, and indeed to all of us?

It's difficult to know all that much historical fact about St David. Although he really existed, he is long gone now and most of what we know comes from the story of his life written by a monk called Rhigyfarch in the 11th century. Yet there are elements of that story which help us to think about the gift of seeing, and in particular, the gift of seeing God in the world around us.

We know that St David was a monk who founded a monastery in west Wales. He was responsible then, for being a sign of faith in Jesus to others, and leaving behind him visible communities of faith for all to see. We know too that he was active in bringing Christian faith to people living in Wales who had never before encountered the gospel. Many churches in Wales today are dedicated to him and themselves are visible witnesses today to the living communities of the Christian faith. St David's cathedral is built on the site of St David's monastery.



Photo: Dave Morris

**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



Activity

Individually, or with friends, find a map of your local area. Mark on the map all the visible signs of Christian presence and witness you can think of - churches, places where posters and notices are put up, church schools, war memorials, churchyards, Christian charity shops etc. Find a time to go around with a camera and see if you can spot any others you have missed. Add them to your map. If there are any areas where Christian presence is lacking, find out why. What might be the most appropriate and sensitive way to make Christ known in such an area, as St David did?

GOING DEEPER

Thinking about St David



A stained glass window in Jesus College Chapel, Oxford, showing St David and the dove.

Photo: Casper Gutman 

The best-known miracle associated with Saint David has also to do with the ability to see the Christian presence. It is said to have taken place when he was preaching in the middle of a large crowd at the Synod of Llanddewi Brefi. When those at the back of the crowd began to complain that they could not see or hear him, St David is supposed to have placed a handkerchief on the ground and stood on it at which the ground on which he stood is said to have risen up to form a small hill so that everyone could see him. This miracle is said to have been accompanied by a sign: a white dove settled on his shoulder to show he had God's grace and blessing.





Activity

Look at the picture of St David (previous page) carefully. What can you see in the picture? Make a list of the things you can see. Now think about whether you could explain what the various elements of the image are to a person who knows nothing about the Christian faith. See if you could answer or guess some of these questions by means of what you can see in the stained glass image. If you don't know, some suggestions are provided below.

Questions

1. Why is there a bird on the person's shoulder?
2. Why is he wearing those clothes?
3. Why are there five jewels on the cross?
4. What does he have on the back on his hands?
5. What is he holding in his right hand?
6. Where is he?
7. Why do the bird and the man have gold circles round their heads?

Have a look in your place of worship for a window or another image that you could use to talk to someone about your faith. If you don't have any Christian images in your place of worship, you could use a religious book which has pictures.

Answers

1. A dove is traditionally an image of the Holy Spirit and is a sign that a person has received God's grace and blessing. Matthew 3.16; Luke 3.22
2. St David was made a bishop and (according to the story) an Archbishop. He wears the clothing of that office, including a bishop's hat (mitre) and robes.
3. Sometimes crosses are shown with five jewels or other marks. When they do they signify the five wounds of Christ: two wounds in his hands, two in his feet and the wound in his side.
4. These might be part of his bishop's regalia, but might also be a reference to his saintliness by suggesting the stigmata - marks or wounds on the hands to show identification with the suffering of Jesus. Galatians 6.17
5. As a Christian, he might be holding a bible or prayer book, perhaps a book of psalms.
6. He is shown within the characteristic architecture of an important church. As a bishop we would expect to find him in his cathedral.
7. Haloes of gold around people's heads are used in Christian art to show that those people are holy.





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. You can also use it or adapt it to imagine what it was like for the people at the back of the crowd trying to see St David and not being able to get close to him.

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?
- How do you think the people felt when they were finally able to see and hear St David?

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

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

St David is supposed to have said: 'Be joyful, and keep your faith and your creed. Do the little things that you have seen me do and heard about. I will walk the path that our fathers have trod before us.'

Sometimes it is the little things that make the most difference, but we also have to notice the little things that need to be done and pay attention to them.





Lord,
Help us to notice the little things:
the weary man with the heavy load,
the puzzled stranger who is lost,
the hurt creature by the roadside.
Teach us to see your Spirit working everywhere,
and to be the signs of your love,
so that we may be your faithful witnesses
as David was.
Amen

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'. You can also look at the main resource for this Sunday on www.sensemakingfaith.org.uk.

John Davies, *A History of Wales/Hanes Cymru*, published in both English and Welsh editions, Penguin 1994, revised edition 2007

Rhygyvarch, *Life of St David*, Rhydbooks, 2001

Rowan Williams, *Silence and Honey Cakes*, Lion Publishing 2004

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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