

Along the track

Insights, Not Just Sights

This catch phrase was attached to an advertisement for a tour to be accompanied by various local experts in art, music and food. It adds a new dimension to just another trip. It is not uncommon to see tourists get off the bus, take photos and get straight back on. You are left wondering, what did they see? What did they understand about this place, about its history, its people?

It is easy enough to rush through life, seeing but not appreciating, observing but not understanding. We can miss a lot by not taking the time to pause, to appreciate, to enjoy. That's the way of today's world – to get you to do more, consume more, buy more. It's hard to slow down and enjoy life. That may seem as if we are running the risk of not keeping up, or that we might miss out on something. Just taking a moment to appreciate what we have, how we have been blessed and continue to be blessed can make an enormous difference to ourselves, our relationships, our happiness.

We can skim over our faith too, not seeing its beauty and its depth, its ability to enrich our life. It is a mistake to see it simply as a set of doctrines and rules, however important they may be. They are means to an end. They are designed to help us to be curious, to look beyond the obvious, beyond the explainable, to question and to examine the deeper mysteries of life and its meaning, to go from sights to insights.

When Jesus heals people who are blind, we can regard that as just another miracle. But that is looking without understanding. Jesus gives the blind more than just physical sight; he's opening their eyes so that that can see more deeply. Faith isn't just something we have – it needs time, reflection, openness and curiosity. In an age that demands almost instant answers, that can be challenging. Faith invites us to explore the mysteries of life. Mystery doesn't always provide immediate answers but it can reveal another dimension to ordinary things, people, interactions, and events.

It is not by chance that Mark includes three stories in a row about seeing. They each tell us something about seeing with the eyes of faith. In Mark's Gospel Jesus rebukes his disciples for their lack understanding of his mission, of what He is doing. Jesus asked them, "Why are you debating about having no bread? Do you still not see or understand? Do you have such hard hearts? Having eyes, do you not see? And having ears, do you not hear? And do you not remember? When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many basketfuls of broken pieces did you collect?" "Twelve," they answered.... (8:14-21)

Sometimes we just can't see. The disciples were with Jesus day by day, they heard him, they saw what he did, they came to know him. But, for some reason they could not grasp what he was on about. When he talked about suffering and death, they didn't want to see.

Almost immediately after this incident, Jesus heals the blind man.

They came to Bethsaida, and some people brought a blind man and begged Jesus to touch him. He took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village. When he had spit on the man's eyes and put his hands on him, Jesus asked, "Do you see anything?" He looked up and said, "I see people; they look like trees walking around." Once more Jesus put his hands on the man's eyes. Then his eyes were opened, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly. Mark 8 22- 26

But even when we can see, we do not always understand, we fail to see the full picture. Unusually for Jesus, it took a couple of goes for this person to see clearly. There is a lesson in that. The blind person doesn't say 'you didn't get it right' – rather, I can see but not all that clearly. He is probably typical of the rest of us.

Mark illustrates this with another story just after this healing.

Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked them, "Who do people say I am?" They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets." "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" Peter answered, "You are the Messiah." Mark 8:27-30

The disciples hedged their bets – some say this, some say that. Sometimes we can too – I would believe if..., well, I think Jesus was a good man but..... Peter steps out into the deep and takes a rather courageous leap of faith that those around him were not willing to take.

Each incident has something in common. Faith requires an openness to the ways of God (not just our own) and courage to trust.

Regards
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