

Simon Peter should have gone to SpecSavers- there's no doubt. If it weren't for the fact that we're in Lent, I might have preached a sermon about the Humour of God. For not only does Simon Peter not see straight, getting it so wrong- again, but today in the Old Testament reading too, there's a 'you must be joking, God' a moment of not seeing straight. Our prudish Lectionary compilers miss out the subsequent verse to our reading - verse 17, but I have re-inserted it and it reads 'Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed'.- laughed because God was so ridiculous in suggesting that at 100 years old Abraham would sire a child and that at 90 years old Sarah would conceive. Ha!

How we see things, seeing straight, is core to the readings today- and core to how we view this Lenten 40 days too. I think it may have been Groucho Marx, certainly not Karl, who said that he read the Bible every day- in order to find loopholes. But the way we read the scriptures will impact what we see in them and therefore what we draw from them - so see the humour, see the ridiculous and the teasing and the extraordinary in these stories. We don't have to read them with a straight face- but we certainly should read them and see them for what they are.

The whole thrust of the Gospel today is about seeing and not seeing, seeing and understanding. So much so that Mark begins this section of his Gospel with a story about just

that, about seeing more clearly- remember the one? In Bethsaida a blind man is brought to Jesus. Jesus spits on his eyes and the blind man says, 'I see men, but they look like trees walking', so Jesus tries again and this time perfect vision is restored.and then comes this conversation with Simon Peter. Clearly Simon Peter- and probably the other disciples too- had very fixed ideas about what the Messiah might be like, what he'd do, say, his attitudes, his course of action. But it's like the blind man, they don't see clearly, they haven't yet twigged that traditional teaching and views about a Messiah, the anointed one of God, are just that- traditional views, they don't see Jesus subverting, redefining those views through the integrity of his words and actions- his living it

out in healing, feeding reconciling, including all in the love of God. Hence, they cannot see that God in human form could possibly have to suffer, or be rejected, be killed or rise again, they don't see the consequences of the actions of their friend Jesus. Simon Peter has no vision of this- so utters this totally understandable, but unthought through view that this mustn't happen.

So, Mark has Jesus telling the disciples very plainly- along with the crowd-

'If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves, take up their cross and follow me'.

It's a very clear warning for anyone who wants to share in this adventure, this way of living- that it may well be costly. The early church story

is full of those who were willing to face up to martyrdom for their engagement with, their commitment to the Christ like way of living. And remember It's only just over a hundred years since many, many Quakers , among others, were imprisoned in this country as conscientious objectors in WW1 because they believed that following Christ meant they couldn't bear arms against another human being. In the conflict in Gaza today, Christian medical staff and aid workers, among others, are clinging on to carry out their duties which are at the heart of their faith. In many places in our world to live Gospel truth is to risk everything.

Yes, seeing things as they really are- then and now, is costly. A costly hope which pervades

the Gospel- and must pervade our living of it too. Yet, it's as troubling for us with our weak imaginings, our limited vision, as it was for Simon Peter with his. We so often want faith, to be the source of comfort and success for our living. We'd really rather, like Simon Peter, take Jesus to one side and suggest we skip the ugly bits.

Lent is an opportunity for a sight test- a reality check. What does the Christian alternative to materialism, consumerism- their impact on our climate, our very existence, cycles of attack and retaliation- whether as individuals, communities, or nations, what does a Gospel sightline afford, what might a Christian vision look like? How much of our living is lip-service to Christ- not necessarily out of cynicism on our

part, but living amidst so many other pressures for success, endless growth, insatiable acquisition 'the whole world' as Mark says, but losing true sight, true understanding of what ultimately matters.

Truly seeing, what the cost of faith might be, to die a little to the world's norms in order that we live a little more for God's way is the work of a lifetime, but it could start this Lent. Where might it lead **you** to say of Jesus of Nazareth 'You are the Messiah'. The thing is, you won't ever know until the moment it does lead you to stand and make a decision for Christ at work, at home, in the spending of your money or with pencil in hand in the voting booth.

So perhaps use the rest of Lent as a faith for
living eye test: For be sure, 'Get thee behind me
Satan' is not what we want to hear.

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25.02.24