

**LENT 2009: Sense Making Faith
Week 1 - Journey into Seeing**

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.

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

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

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.

Hebrews 13: 20-21

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

Questions – Look at the picture



How does this picture make you feel?

What does this picture say about human beings? Our world?

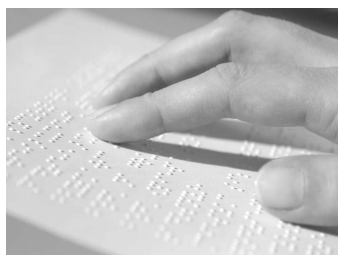
What do you think God might be telling us through this picture?

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

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?

READ Mark 10: 46-52

Some questions to think about

1. Why did Jesus respond to Bartimaeus?
2. What do you think Jesus meant by 'your faith has made you whole?'
3. 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