From Wilderness to Resurrection Hope

Lent 4: Open Our Eyes

Readings: 1 Samuel 16.1–1 , Ephesians 5.8–14, John 9

The wilderness can be disorientating. When everything looks the same our vision can become blurred. Familiar landmarks disappear and we are forced to look again, to look more deeply, to see with new eyes. Our readings today share a single, insistent theme. God invites us to see differently. To look beyond surface appearance, beyond assumptions, beyond our narrow certainties. Lent offers us this invitation too.

In chapter 16 of 1 Samuel, Samuel goes to Bethlehem in obedient uncertainty. Saul's kingship has unravelled, the future looks fragile, and Samuel is grieving. God sends him to Jesse's household to anoint the next king but God gives no indication of who that will be. Samuel, like us, is tempted to rely on what he can see: height, stature, outward strength. But God interrupts him with one of the most significant lines in all of Scripture:

"The Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart."

One by one the impressive sons pass before Samuel. All the "obvious" choices. But God keeps saying no. In desperation Samual quizzes Jesse, "Are all your sons here". It turns out that God's choice is the boy who wasn't even invited to the sacrificial feast. The overlooked shepherd, the one smelling of sheep. David, the youngest, the unexpected one. God asks Samuel to see what he has not seen before. God asks him to open his eyes.

Paul takes this theme further in Ephesians:

"For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light… Sleeper, awake! Rise from the dead."



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Light does not only expose what is broken; it reveals what can be healed. In this sense, the movement from darkness to light is the movement from not seeing to seeing clearly, from narrowness to spaciousness, from fear to hope.

Lent is not simply about giving stuff up. It's about illumination. Opening our eyes, hearts, minds to new possibilities, new ways of seeing.

And then John gives us the long, extraordinary story of the man born blind. It is a story threaded through with misunderstanding, avoidance, blame, and denial. It is a story of people seeing without perceiving, looking without understanding.

The disciples want to debate whose fault the blindness is. The neighbours can hardly recognise the healed man. The Pharisees cannot accept what they see. Even the man's parents are too afraid to speak openly. Over and over again, the question returns: Who can truly see? And who is blind?

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Lent 4: Open Our Eyes (continued)

> **In the face of conflict, displacement, trauma, and profound loss, we urgently need the gift of God-opened eyes. Eyes that can see the dignity of every human being, even amid division. Eyes that recognise suffering irrespective of our own position. Eyes that constantly scan the horizon for signs of hope. Eyes that seek justice and peace, not retribution or fear.**

The man born blind receives not only physical sight but spiritual insight. Step by step, he grows in clarity, courage, and faith. Meanwhile, those who believe they see most clearly are revealed to be stuck in darkness. The story ends with Jesus' piercing words,"I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind."

This is God's invitation to us to approach the world around us with humility, with openness, to recognise the limits of our vision and to ask Christ to open our eyes.

These readings land with real force when we consider the world as it is today especially here in the land we call holy, where Jesus walked, healed, and restored sight.

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The wilderness of pain in this land can narrow our vision, tempting us to reduce people to headlines, to take sides too quickly and to cling to simple narratives. But Scripture calls us to something deeper. It calls us to ask to see with the eyes of Christ.

For over 170 years, Embrace has worked alongside Christian partners in the Middle East who help us see differently, who reveal Christ's light in places the world often overlooks.

Like Samuel, they see the child, the patient, the mother, the refugee whom others may pass by. Like Paul they see the possibility of light in people's lives even where trauma has overshadowed everything. Like the man born bling they see what compassion can do when others insist nothing can change.

Whether through medical care, trauma counselling, education, relief work, or advocacy rooted in justice and dignity, our partners help open eyes, our own included. They invite us to see not only the wounds of the region but its resilience, its faithfulness, its astonishing capacity for hope.

So the central question of these readings becomes the question of Lent. Where do I need Christ to open my eyes? Where have I been looking only on outward appearances? Where have I been walking in shadows when I could walk in the light? Whose story have I not fully heard? Whose suffering have I failed to recognise? Whose courage and faith have I overlooked?

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From Wilderness to Resurrection Hope

Lent 4: Open Our Eyes (continued)

And how might letting Christ open my eyes widen my compassion, deepen my commitment to justice, and draw me closer to those whose lives are entwined with my own?

The wilderness is not the end. For Samuel, for the Ephesians, for the man born blind, for us, true sight leads to transformation. It leads to anointing a new king. To living as children of light. To recognising Jesus in our midst. To seeing God's work where we least expect it. This is how resurrection hope begins. Not with certainty, but with vision. Not with believing that we've got it all sewn up, but with humility. Not with closed eyes, but open ones.

So we pray, in this wilderness season that God would open our hearts, minds and eyes to God's healing presence and so fill us with tenacious resurrection hope.

Amen.

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