

Teacher – let me see again.

See is a word with many meanings. Let's try going with vision and understanding.

Mary Jones could see how wonderful it would be to have her own Bible in Welsh and in the closing years of the 18<sup>th</sup> century she saved for six years to buy her own and then walked 26 miles cross country to buy one.

Her story spread – from North Wales to London. William Wilberforce and his friends in Clapham saw how important it is for people to have the Bible in their native language and formed the Bible Society. Today the fourth Sunday in October is still kept as Bible Sunday and people the world over still desire their own Bibles

What can you see in your Bible? Among other things I see a wonderful history of humanity's search for God. It is valuable because it documents the changing understanding of God's nature from prehistory to historically recorded times. The bible tells us that there have been times when humanity did unspeakable things believing them to be God's will – and we know well that that was not only in the Old Testament. As we look back on our history we can't pretend it didn't happen.

But as we read the Hebrew bible – our Old Testament - it is clear that the way people see **God** changes. There is a clear journey. God is seen as creator, warrior, tribal, punitive, even vengeful. But God is also seen as liberator, caring, just and loving. Just think of psalm 23 - The Lord is my shepherd. Ideas of God's nature are becoming gentler.

In our reading from Jeremiah today I saw something I hadn't seen before. My eye was caught by a single word in the last verse. God says - "I have become a **father** to Israel - and Ephraim is my firstborn". There are not many other instances of that use of the word Father in the Old testament but the idea that God can be seen as father is clearly developing 500 years before Christ.

And then in the new testament we see a huge change. Jesus consistently – constantly - refers to God as father – I think not in a gender specific way but implying a loving tender compassionate parent.

In our gospel reading we find Jesus in Jericho, the city of palms. He is deliberately making his final journey from galilee in the north where he has been saying publicly in Matthew's version that the religious leaders are blind guides. They are keeping their powerful position by promoting ideas which have little to do with the kingdom of God. Jesus claimed authority with his subversive formula "You have heard it said ... but I say unto you ..." As he nears Jerusalem **he can see** that he is walking into a confrontation with the authorities at the seat of power and that he faces potentially fatal consequences.

In Jericho we find blind Bartimaeus - a Jew who could previously see but is **now blind**. He is in a place of darkness. He has heard about Jesus' teaching - a message of love and forgiveness and the kingdom of God - but he can no longer see.

Faith is such a rich word. It carries so many nuances - but I think that it includes trust and loyalty and **vision** - it is so much more than just belief in facts. Bartimaeus wants vision - he wants to see - and he hears that Jesus is nearby. Bartimaeus **trusts** that Jesus can do something. He proclaims his **loyalty** to his Jewish faith and its Messianic expectation by calling out "Son of David" - indicating that for him Jesus is the Messiah.

That annoys Jesus' friends. They try to shush him. They know that's a risky thing to **think**, let alone to shout out. You never know who is listening. Caesar is in charge and Herod is the puppet king. The authorities are on the look out for any sign of dissent.

But that call of faith "Son of David have mercy on me - Eleison" is enough. Jesus doesn't touch Bartimaeus' eyes or **do** anything dramatic. He just says "Your faith has saved you". Bartimaeus' trust and loyalty have restored his vision, he **can** see again. He is set free and Mark tells us that he follows Jesus on **the way** - words used by the early church to describe what we call Christianity

For the gospel writers physical ailments and spiritual distress are part of a single continuum. The key to relief here is faith, recognising who Jesus is, trusting in him, being loyal to him and sharing his vision- so that we can see how things really are **now** - and how they **can** be in the kingdom of God, a place of love, invitation, welcome and forgiveness, a place where in the words of Wilberforce and his Clapham brethren goodness is fashionable.

Teacher – let me see again.