

God Who Sees



A few weeks ago, I heard scratches and thuds in the night coming from our veranda. Next day I noticed that the door of our broom cupboard was a little ajar. I opened it fully, and came face to face, or eye to eye, with an intruder, a small brush-tail possum!

Since then, we see each other from time to time, when he or she chooses to spend the day, (possums are nocturnal) sleeping on the top shelf of the cupboard. This possum visitor has few needs, not requiring food or water. Its presence is a gift, giving me pleasure.

To be able to see what is visible around us, and perhaps what is hidden, is a gift we can take for granted and fail to appreciate. At the end of a Covid-19 lockdown we may suddenly realize how wonderful it is to see again the faces of our friends, even if their smiles are hidden by masks! To see trees, plants, and animals, such as a small possum or an inquisitive magpie, (neither *always* welcomed by householders) is also something to be enjoyed. But seeing can also be used to gain power over others.

Those of us with laptops, tablets or smartphones, know how they can be used to communicate with friends, obtain information, and attend meetings and church services. But there is a shadow side to their use. Lately people have experienced an increase of scam emails, messages and phone calls. Personal details in our emails, and what we stop to read on social media, is 'seen' by technology, collected and used to extract money from us. Such gathered data is sometimes sold to companies for advertising, and employed to manipulate our

thinking. This secret 'seeing', in which we have unknowingly participated, invades our personal life, aims to control us and can distress us. There is no working for the common good, or caring for others involved in such surveillance. It is not 'seeing' as God sees, nor is it how we are to 'see' others when showing God's love to them.

In Genesis 16, we read of an event in the lives of Abram, Sarai his wife, and Hagar, Sarai's Egyptian slave-girl. Sarai, who could not conceive, gave Hagar to Abram to obtain an heir. When Hagar became pregnant the relationship between the two women deteriorated, and Hagar fled to a spring in the desert. Here God saw her, told her to return to Sarai, and that she would bear a son and have many descendants. Hagar identified "the angel of the Lord" or "the Lord" who spoke to her as, 'God who sees', and the spring was called, 'the well of the Living One who sees me.' The slave-girl who had run away from her mistress, was seen by God, who looked at her with love and compassion. God spoke to her, not to judge or punish her, but to guide her in fulfilling God's loving promise for her.

In the New Testament we have stories about Jesus seeing people and encouraging their inner potential to develop. In John 4, we read of a Samaritan woman who went alone to collect water at a well where Jesus was resting. We are not told specifically that Jesus saw this woman, but it can be assumed as he initiated a conversation with her, asking for a drink. By choosing to talk to such a woman, Jesus crossed two social barriers, a gender one as a lone male talking to a woman, and an ethnic one as a Jew who would be expected to ignore a despised Samaritan. The conversation between Jesus and the woman progressed from a discussion about "being thirsty" and "living water", to the revelation that Jesus knew her past life with all its failures and successes.

Finally Jesus identified himself to her as the promised Messiah or Christ. The amazed woman immediately abandoned her water jar, and rushed back to the city to call others to "come and see" Jesus, and decide for themselves whether or not this man *was* the Messiah. Although not fully certain of Jesus' identity herself, she became a valued instrument of God, a gift, through whom many other Samaritans saw and believed that Jesus was indeed, "the Saviour of the world."

It is noteworthy that both these stories occurred at a spring or well, a life-giving image. These two women of low social status, responded to God's seeing them and unexpected meeting with them, by embracing what was told them, and willingly acting for the good of others.

Each of us are also seen by God, just as we are - in our grief, despair, failures, successes and pleasures. God's seeing is a gift to us. It does not result in us being condemned or rejected, but being respected, forgiven and helped to develop our love and care for others.

As followers of Jesus Christ and members of his body, we are called to see others as potential valued gifts of God to love, and not problems that annoy us, or we must control. If people hurt us, we are not to retaliate by harming them or turning away from them. Instead, we might ask ourselves, "Can I try to see not just the outside of the other, but the hidden inside where he or she could be struggling, God is present, and love can grow?" Turning to the rest of creation, can we look also at animals and plants as precious gifts of God, giving thanks for them and rejoicing in their existence?

God sees us and loves us deeply with a vulnerable, yet powerful love, delighting when we love, serve and are served by, others. God loves all members of creation, even a small possum that decides to sleep in a broom cupboard on a veranda, and be seen and valued as a loving gift of God.

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