

Look

When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognised him; and he vanished from their sight.

The companions on the road to Emmaus have walked with Jesus for a good while. They have talked together, and he has explained the scriptures to them. And now, as night falls, they urge him to stay with them. It is while they are at the table that they finally see. When Jesus takes the bread, blesses and breaks it, they realise who is with them. Suddenly their eyes are opened and they recognise him.

There are many moments in the Bible where people in an encounter with God all of a sudden see. Even in Genesis (28:16), Jacob said: 'Surely, the Lord is in this place – and I did not know it.'

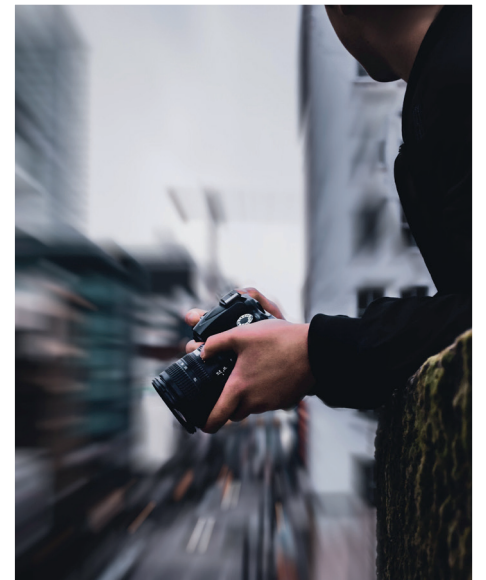
At a burning bush (Exodus 3:1-15), after a miraculous catch (John 21:1-8) and even in the midst of persecution on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-18), eyes are opened and people see anew. As a result, they look at themselves and the world around them with new eyes. This is the seeing of faith that has God as its focus. It is a seeing that is aware that God is present, walking alongside, revealing Godself in the breaking of bread. It is an awareness that all of creation is vibrating with the presence of God.

It is a seeing that makes us walk in the world differently – it changes us, it softens our hearts and makes us more compassionate. It makes us look at the world with the eyes of Jesus, who, seeing the crowds, was filled with compassion and moved to healing, forgiving, feeding and restoring. It makes us look at the world with eyes of grace. And when we look at the world with the eyes of grace, we will see its signs everywhere.

A disciple looks

Despite years of experiencing oppression for being a Christian in Pakistan, Aftab Alexander Mughal, a United Reformed Church elder, continues to use his gifts and talents to struggle for a more just society, both in the UK and in his country of origin. Aftab says:

'Christianity is the biggest religion in the world. Millions of Christians are able to live a peaceful life, but in some countries around the globe, faithful Christians face discrimination and oppression. Pakistan is one of those where native Christians face persecution because of their faith and live in absolute poverty because they don't have the equal opportunities needed for a dignified life. As a Pakistani Christian, that unpleasant experience has had a significant influence on me.'



'When, in 1984, I saw that a Christian neighbourhood and its church was attacked, I decided to raise my voice against human rights violations and injustices against all downtrodden sections of society, including religious minorities. Firstly, I formed a Christian youth group, and then I started publishing a magazine. I also used to write articles for the national media.

'Human rights activism is not easy in Pakistan, so I faced a lot of pressures from state agencies and non-state actors. I have been attacked a couple of times, but carried on my struggle because of my faith. The following verse is always a great encouragement to me: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free," (Luke 4:18).

'Because of the ongoing troubles, at one point, friends advised me to leave the country for the safety of my family. We therefore fled Pakistan and arrived in the UK in 2005 to start a new life. Although I have been living in the UK for 14 years, I still raise my voice for a just society in Pakistan by publishing a monthly e-magazine, *Minority Concern of Pakistan*.

'Now that I am living in the UK, I have become a member of the United Reformed Church and am continuing to serve people who need help the most. For the last few years, I have been helping the refugee community to integrate into local society. My focus is to empower them, so they can have the independent and dignified life which so many are unable to enjoy.'

Something to ponder

Like the stranger on the road to Emmaus, God is walking with you. How has the grace and goodness of God been revealed to you in your own life? Where do you see the signs of God's grace and goodness in your community?

Prayer

Companion Christ,
As we walk through this world,
our minds cluttered and our hearts closed,
open our eyes to the wonder of your presence,
that we may see the world as you see it
and become what you want us to be –
people of compassion and grace, light and love.
Amen

Suggested response

Think about a piece of art that you have encountered, a clip you've watched online or a film/TV programme you have seen. Ask yourself what God may be showing you through it. Share your answer with someone else.

