



## Eyes to see

I am afflicted by spiritual blindness. It is embarrassing, really, the frequency with which God's hand is at work right before my eyes, but I fail to see it, or at least, I often do not see it until long after I expect myself to have noticed.

Perhaps spiritual blindness afflicts us all. It certainly seems to have been a staple feature of the experience of Jesus' contemporaries. Even a casual reading of the gospels leaves one breathless at the number of times Jesus felt constrained to observe that his fellows had eyes, but could not see God at work in him. Nor was this malady restricted to the authorities. In John 14, at the very cusp of the arrest of Jesus, Philip asks Jesus to "show us the Father." Perhaps wearily, perhaps with exasperation, Jesus responds, "Have I been with you so long and yet you do not know me? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father." We seem to have a built-in resistance to seeing God at work, even when the evidence is right before our eyes. We look, but we do not see.

I have been ruminating on the triumphal entry lately, on the excited crowd, and the sadness that Jesus seems to carry. It is a story of two powerful symbols. On the one hand the crowd waving their palm branches. On the other, offering a competing symbol for the day, is Jesus, astride a donkey. Jesus' contemporaries had grown used to thinking about God in a certain way.

They had good reason. Their history taught them that God would intervene and deliver them. He had done so, in those signal moments of the past, by sending a deliverer. In 164 BC, after a stunning three-year campaign, a rag-tag group of Jewish freedom fighters defeated the forces of the Seleucid empire, freeing Israel from the oppressors that had desecrated their temple. On the day the victorious Maccabees ascended the road to Jerusalem for the ceremony commemorating the temple cleansing, the grateful crowds laid palm branches before them. Another crowd would do the same for Jesus, saying to him in effect, you too expel the foreigner. But Jesus rode a donkey. He was saying, God is at work in a new way. God will deliver, but not in a way you expect. Open your eyes and see. Do not merely look, but see.

I am reminded of the words a frustrated Oliver Cromwell spoke to the Scottish Puritans in 1650: "I beseech you, in the bowels of Christ, think it possible that you may be wrong." Like Philip, the crowd was certain that God would act just this way, and not that. But discipleship consists in part of recognizing that, as Isaiah 43:19 declares, God is about doing a new thing. When we imagine that we know how God should act, we rob ourselves of seeing his hand at work in new ways. New ways in our world, our communities, our churches, our very lives. When God moves in a new way, are we poised to see it? Or do we merely look without seeing?

I hold palm branches in my hand. I am working on letting go of them. What palm branches are clutched in yours? □

## FINDING THE Holy

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 13

where I take time to see what is along the path, as much as I am able.

While solitude of a few moments or hours can be woven into the fabric of our lives, it is often helpful to get away to find solitude. Retreat centers offer an opportunity to be in space that has usually been carefully prepared to enhance an experience of solitude. There is no radio to report on traffic conditions or give a weather report; there is no television drama to provide another plot if our own life feels a bit lacking; there is no cell phone to bring us urgent messages, or computers to check our email. But there are usually paths to follow, comfortable spaces to sit and rest, and blessed silence. There may also be someone who could talk with you about your journey or a book or article that provides just the right amount of companionship for your retreat.

Retreat houses are usually not difficult to find and are often listed in the local telephone directories. Generally these places of retreat understand hospitality to be at the center of their ministry, and offer a warm welcome at a reasonable cost. Often, if they are unable to accommodate you for some reason, they are able to direct you to another house. Your pastor might also be a resource in locating a nearby retreat house environment that supports the practice of solitude and silence.

I am no longer the mother of three children under six years old; now I am the mother of three teenaged children. And I still long with a similar and perhaps even a greater intensity for times of solitude. Times when I can sit apart and rest for a few moments or hours or days, times to discover again myself and my God and be surprised once more. Without these times of solitude I can feel scattered and lost and even lonely in spite of being surrounded by family and friends. But in a time of solitude I can find again my center and let God gather my scattered pieces into the woman the Creator fashioned me to be. □

---

David P. Nystrom is chairperson of the department of biblical and theological studies at North Park University. The *Companion* welcomes David this month as a columnist. His column will appear every other month.