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Introduction

Next Sunday, with the start of Holy Week, the focus of Lent changes as we move into the final days of Jesus' life and begin to journey with him towards the cross. So this week is a good moment to pause and review the theme we have been tracing through the Gospel readings from Ash Wednesday to this point – that of things hidden and things revealed. The Johanine pericope we encounter today helps us to do just that: as we see Jesus in public conversation for the last time, there are assorted echoes and resonances with our previous readings which help to bring out some of the patterns which shape the hidden/revealed dichotomy and its dynamics.

Today is also **Corrymeela Sunday** and there is a special set of resources for this which include notes on the lectionary readings, a reflection, and some prayers. These can be found [here](#).

Preparation

Find some examples of patterns of different types (e.g. geometric, random, fractals, fibonacci etc.) and from different sources (e.g. nature, architecture, decorative design etc.) Choose one or two which really appeal to you and spend some time exploring them in different ways. What do you notice about these patterns? Alternatively you might like to experiment with making some patterns of your own in whatever media appeal to you.

Then take a few moments to re-read the Gospel passages for Ash Wednesday and Lent 1-4. Make a list of words/phrases/ideas which stand out to you for whatever reason. Do any patterns emerge? Can the patterns you explored/created help you to find different sorts of patterns emerging from the readings?

Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus.

Jesus answered them, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor.

“Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say—? Father, save me from this hour”? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name.” Then a voice came from heaven, “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.”

The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, “An angel has spoken to him.”

Jesus answered, “This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die.

Comment

The second verse in today’s passage nicely encapsulates what has been at the heart of our Lent reflections: “*Sir, we wish to see Jesus.*” say the Greeks to Philip – a request which anticipates the one which Philip himself will shortly be making in 14:8, and which also has echoes of Jesus’ first exchange with Andrew (Jn 1:38), the other player in this vignette (“*Where are you staying?*” “*Come and you will see.*”) We don’t know what prompted their request – perhaps they had heard about the raising of Lazarus, perhaps they had seen and been intrigued or mystified by Jesus’ manner of entering Jerusalem. Neither does John tell us if they succeeded in their quest. Instead he uses the incident, as he has earlier done with Nicodemus’ questions and will later do with Philip’s plea to be shown the Father, as another opportunity to take his readers a little further on the journey he wants them to make. For John the life, words, and actions of Jesus are the way in which the character and nature of God is revealed to the world (Jn 1:14;18) and so the purpose of his Gospel narrative is to help his readers come to see, understand, and accept the true identity of Jesus and all that follows from this. Throughout the New Testament there is a strong connection between seeing and knowing, recognising and understanding, and John wants to help his readers from recognition to understanding and ultimately from understanding towards belief.

It is this particular thread that we have been tracing through our Lent readings – how do hidden things become revealed and what things stand in the way of this process? Certain elements have come up on more than one occasion, and in different shapes and forms, in our readings over the last 5 weeks. Their appearance again in today’s passage gives us the opportunity to bring together and summarise four different patterns which play a part in this process.

Firstly: moments of ‘unveiling’ – when we suddenly realise something for the first time – need to be tested in certain ways if they are to help us towards a better understanding of ourselves, of others, or of different situations. In our Lent 1 reflection we considered how the wilderness experience which Jesus undergoes after his baptism provides the opportunity for him to test and temper, not just the sense of identity which has just been confirmed by God, but also his understandings of how this should shape his subsequent choices and actions. His

response to the agitation he feels in v27 might perhaps be giving us a glimpse of him revisiting this journey and using it as a touchstone... *“And what should I say... Father save me from this hour? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour.”*

We also saw, in the Lent 2 story of Peter’s blunder, the necessity for critical reflection on imaginative leaps of understanding and whether we have made the right connections with these – something I will return to further in point 3 below.

Secondly: coming to see something which has previously been hidden from us is not necessarily an instantaneous thing. Often the journey towards fully seeing and understanding is one which happens in stages – some of which may have a ‘one-step forward, two steps back’ feel at times. Occasionally Jesus has to use a counterintuitive image – as with the Moses/serpent story last week, or the loving/losing hating/keeping conundrum in v25 here to try and jolt people out of a rut and on to the next step towards better understanding. And it may well be that full understanding only comes with hindsight: our Lent 3 reading indicated that it is only in retrospect – once they have also experienced Jesus’ death and resurrection – that the disciples understand his comments about raising the temple in 3 days. This is something which we see elsewhere in John’s gospel – for example immediately prior to today’s passage, after Jesus enters Jerusalem, the evangelist tells us that *‘His disciples did not understand these things at first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written of him and had been done to him’* (12:16) Although there’s no direct allusion to it in our current reading, we know that shortly Jesus will be going to great lengths to help his disciples along the road to understanding but they, even after all they have seen, heard and begun to grasp, will still be asking *“where are you going?” “How can we know the way?”* or requesting that he *“show us the Father”*. Eventually the pieces fall into place and they understand – but only because they have remained on the journey. To gain understanding requires us to look and look again, to look intently, to recall and to stay with faithful to these processes until the different pieces fall into place.

Thirdly : our ability to see hidden things can be obstructed by our pre-commitments or world views – which are themselves also often hidden from us. A voice from heaven as part of an unveiling moment is already familiar from the story of Jesus’ baptism at Lent 1. There the revelation was in support of Jesus’ own understanding (*‘he saw’; ‘you are my Son, the Beloved..’*); here it is for the benefit of others (v20). However not only do they not appear to recognise it for what it is (*‘thunder’ ‘an angel’*) but we also see a repeat of what happened with the disciples in our Lent 2 reading when Jesus’ first outlines what his Messiahship will mean. There is the same disconcerting disjunction for those listening to Jesus: the ‘Son of Man’ with whom they would have been familiar from the books of Daniel and Enoch was an undefeatable conqueror sent by God, and one can thus imagine that there might have been a certain frisson when Jesus alludes to the arrival of the hour for the Son of Man to be glorified. However he then goes on to talk not of conquest and triumph but of loss and death and we can see (if we read on a little beyond the end of the set passage) his hearers plunged into the jarring discord of an overturned world view – *“how can you say...” “who is this Son of Man?”* Sometimes our attachments (for whatever reasons) to certain understandings can be an active block to progress towards seeing the true nature of things. This becomes even clearer if we read on a little further still to v36b where the use of the passive voice indicates that after this exchange Jesus was hidden from (i.e veiled to) them. Even when we make intuitive leaps, our preconceptions can skew the connection in the wrong direction as they did with Peter, hence the need for critical reflection at such moments.

Finally: what we do and say draws attention to what might be hidden within or beyond us – our intentions, beliefs, passions, commitments etc. – something which can be either a help or a hinderance depending on what we are pointing towards. We have seen this in various ways in our readings – beginning with the passage for Ash Wednesday with its challenge as to whether we do things to boost our ego/reputation or to point beyond ourselves to something richer and deeper. We saw it in Jesus’ actions in the Temple in Lent 3, and we see it again here as Jesus entreats heaven and God speaks, and in his words about life and death and his references to his own death – with all that these imply about the nature of his Kingdom and of the Father, whose Incarnate Word he is. In fact this is the whole point of both of the Gospels from which our Lent readings have been drawn: Mark and John seek to reveal the true identity and nature of Jesus and his Kingdom to their readers, and through that, to reveal God himself.

The ability to see things to which we have previously (for whatever reason) been blind – whether that be something about ourselves, or about another, or about the historical/cultural/political/religious aspects of a particular situation – is often an important aspect of moving forward in a conflict situation. The four things about the process of coming to see which we have identified through the Lent Gospel readings: the need to test and reflect on that which we believe we have seen; the gradual nature of ‘seeing’ and the need to stay faithfully with that journey; the necessity of uncovering our own blindspots and understanding how what is hidden within them might be hindering us; and the way in which our own words and actions can help or inhibit the growth of understanding, are thus all useful lenses for reflecting on our own individual or group behaviours in situations of conflict, and helping us to see how we might develop better patterns for these.

Response

Choose just one of the lenses above and use it to reflect on a situation of conflict in which you were, or still are, involved. Can you identify in your own attitudes, words or behaviour things which need to be rethought or refined, and things which need to be celebrated and developed further? Make a list of each and then choose one specific aspect and reflect on how the patterns associated with it can be either remade or strengthened as appropriate. You might find that it helps to use something from your preparatory portfolio of patterns as a different way into thinking about this.

Revisit your list from time to time over the next 6 months to see how things are progressing or to select another aspect to begin to work on.

Prayer

Jesus the Master Patterner,
Help us to become more aware
of the different patterns
of thought and behaviour
which, like unseen hands,
help or hinder
our progress
towards wider, richer, and deeper
understandings
of each other and of ourselves.

And as we grow in awareness
so too may we grow in the confidence and courage
to develop what needs celebrating
and change what needs amending.

So may the patterns of our lives
always point
towards those of your Kingdom.
Amen.

Prayer of the Corrymeela Community

Courage comes from the heart
and we are always welcomed by God,
the Croí* of all being.

We bear witness to our faith,
knowing that we are called
to live lives of courage,
love and reconciliation
in the ordinary and extraordinary
moments of each day.

We bear witness, too, to our failures
and our complicity in the fractures of the world.

May we be courageous today.
May we learn today.
May we love today.
Amen.

*Croí – pronounced 'kree' – is the Irish word for 'heart'