

## Renewed in Hope

### Week 4: Hope grows as we step into it

As Jesus passed by, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” Jesus answered, “Neither he nor his parents sinned; it is so that the works of God might be made visible through him. We have to do the works of the one who sent me while it is day. Night is coming when no one can work. While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made clay with the saliva, and smeared the clay on his eyes, and said to him, “Go wash in the Pool of Siloam” – which means Sent. So he went and washed, and came back able to see. His neighbours and those who had seen him earlier as a beggar said, “Isn’t this the one who used to sit and beg?”

They brought the one who was once blind to the Pharisees. Now Jesus had made clay and opened his eyes on a sabbath. So then the Pharisees also asked him how he was able to see. He said to them, “He put clay on my eyes, and I washed, and now I can see.” So some of the Pharisees said, “This man is not from God, because he does not keep the sabbath.” But others said, “How can a sinful man do such signs?” And there was a division among them. So they said to the blind man again, “What do you have to say about him, since he opened your eyes?” He said, “He is a prophet.” [John 9.1-8,13-17]

#### Video Summary

So many Gospel encounters begin with the phrase ‘Jesus saw’ While others in the Gospels see tax collectors, sinners, Samaritans, nobodies, Jesus saw beyond the labels to the depths of the person – depths that were also unfamiliar to the one who was looked upon. Jesus’ seeing was transformational; his gaze drew out their true being, disentangling them from whatever diminished or distorted this. Hope has its source in God’s seeing. Who are you? Your mirror won’t tell you. Those who have cast their judgement on you and found you wanting won’t tell you; your own inner critic won’t tell you. But go on facing your life into God and you will begin to understand. Prayer is a way of gazing at God and allowing yourself to be gazed upon by one who knows you and wants you to be.

This is the story of the man born blind - or should we name him, the one who came to see? From that beginning of Jesus’ seeing him whole, rather than as a sinner or son of sinners, he dares to step into the dignity of what Jesus sees, and as he does so, he visibly grows. Like the man born blind, you have to step into hope – rather than wait for the feeling of it. Hope grows as we step into it, defying whatever says it’s useless to do so.

#### Some questions for groups

- Who has helped you to begin to believe in yourself; what was it about their response to you that made a difference?
- ‘Humankind looks at outward appearances: God looks at the heart’: What happens when we become fixed on outward appearances?
- How are you being invited to step into the hope God holds for you? What might you have to leave behind to do so?
- What else struck you in the video?

## Some personal exercises for prayer and reflection

### Who are you God, and who am I?

Here is a way of prayer that Clare of Assisi, Francis of Assisi's most faithful companion, shared with those in her community. It is based on gazing at the image of Jesus on the cross. You may want to enlarge this image or look up 'San Damiano Cross' online.



**Gaze:** To gaze is to fix one's attention in one place, but in a relaxed way. Rest your eyes on the image and let it still you. If your eyes or thoughts are drawn elsewhere, gently bring them back to the picture.

### Stepping into hope

Rather than wait for the feeling of hope, we are invited to step into the hope God holds for us, and actively cooperate with God's invitation to us, in so far as we begin to sense it. This week ask God for the grace to sense what your step into hope might be, and to take it, however small or insignificant it might seem.

*All of us with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit. [2 Corinthians 3:18]*

**Consider:** As you gaze, consider what is before you. What strikes you in what you see? What do you understand about Christ through it? Are there any ways you sense some challenge or invitation for you? You may find you don't so much have a thinking response as a feeling response: what are you feeling – can you give it a name?

You may find there are things you want to say to God, or that you sense God is saying to you.

**Contemplate:** Remain gazing attentively. Relax into the image. Rather than being active in your observation and thinking by trying to identify new insights, be present to what you have already thought or felt and let God, if God chooses, take you more deeply into these. This is a time of simply being there, present to God as God is present to you.