

A Healer of Eyesight

OUR eyes are very precious, aren't they? We rely so much on our sight every day, and people with visual impairment or blindness can find life very difficult. In fact we know that the vast majority of what we learn comes through what we see, and we are probably familiar with the expression, 'Seeing is believing'.

This has been recognised for thousands of years, and here is one example. In the seventh century AD, an Irish lady called Modwenna or Modwen travelled to the area we now know as Burton upon Trent, and set up home for seven years with the express purpose of converting the area to

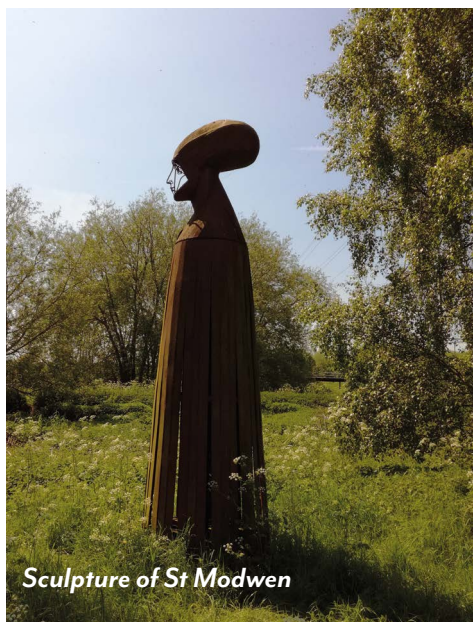
Christianity. She founded an abbey on an island in the River Trent, right in the centre of the town, and later also built a church at Stapenhill on the spot where St Peter's Church now stands. Legend says that she died at the ripe old age of 130, and is buried in Burton, which was formerly known as Mudwennestow (Modwen's place).

Although we don't know much about her character, there are stories that she was a healer of eyesight, or at least had an interest in this area. Blindness is something which not only affects our eyes, but also our hearts and minds. We can be blind to someone's situation, meaning that we don't understand it. Or we can be 'blinded by science'. Modwen may have simply been interested in healing people's spiritual blindness, since she was attempting to convert them to Christianity.

Amazing Ability

It's a great picture, as our eyesight is indeed extremely special. Did you know, for example:

- ◆ In the right conditions and lighting, humans can see the light of a candle from 14 miles away.
- ◆ Your eye is the fastest muscle in your body – hence why when something happens quickly, we say 'in the blink of an eye'!



Sculpture of St Modwen



him, who refused to believe who he was.

Spiritual Blindness

In the First Century, many Jews were waiting eagerly for their Messiah to come. They hoped he would deliver them from the hated Roman oppression in their land, as a victorious conqueror. This is partly why they did not wish to accept that a humble carpenter from the northern backwater of Nazareth, who

had no intention of fighting the Romans or igniting a revolution, was this promised Messiah. Even when Jesus performed miracles, they refused to believe that he was The One. Could they really not see?

Jesus uses the metaphor of seeing when telling his parables. He wants people to think deeply about their spiritual meaning, but he comments that in many cases, people take the story at surface value and do not bother to look into it in greater depth. He quotes some words of the prophet Isaiah, which were written 600 years earlier. These words reflect on the hardness of the human heart when people do not want to listen or to see:

Hearing you will hear, and shall not understand, and seeing you will see and will not perceive; for the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, and their eyes they have closed (Matthew 13:14–15).

- ◆ The human eye can function at 100% capacity at any given moment, without needing to rest.
- ◆ 80% of vision impairment worldwide is curable.
- ◆ Your eyes start to develop just two weeks after conception.
- ◆ About half of the human brain is dedicated to vision and seeing.
- ◆ While a fingerprint has 40 unique characteristics, an iris has 256. This is why retina scans are increasingly being used for security purposes.

In fact, sight is a subject that appears a lot in the Bible. Jesus speaks about eyesight and blindness on several occasions in the Gospels. There are four recorded miracles where he healed people who were blind. There are also many references to the spiritual blindness of the people around

These words could have been written about people in the world today – people who in many ways believe what they want to believe, and do not like having their consciences troubled. They are happy with not looking any further into the purpose of life or the evidence for a Creator.

Given Sight

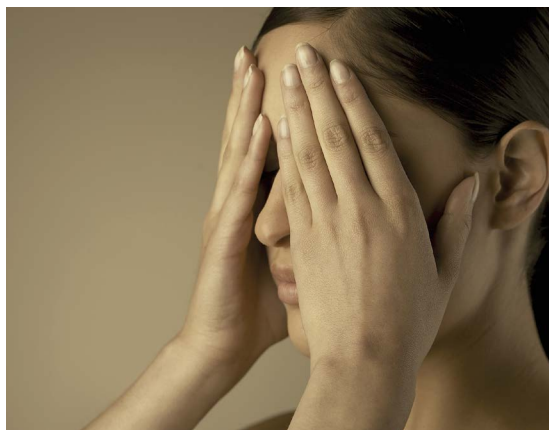
When Jesus heals the man born blind in John chapter 9, we are left in no doubt that this man now ‘sees’ in two different ways – both with his eyes, and with his understanding about Jesus. The Pharisees catch up with him after the miracle, and he says this to them:

Why, this is a marvellous thing, that you do not know where he [Jesus] is from; yet he has opened my eyes! (John 9:30).

There is a dual meaning here; not only has Jesus opened his eyes literally by restoring his physical sight, he has also given him spiritual sight, which he pointed out that the Pharisees do not have. This is what Jesus refers to when he later says:

For judgement I have come into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may be made blind (v39).

This second part of the verse is referring to the way people were refusing to accept who he was, and therefore were counted as spiritually blind. As we’ve already noted, we might say the same thing about the secular society around us, who have no interest in seeing with spiritual eyes.



Jesus also refers to this in the book of Revelation, where he addresses the congregation at Laodicea, a group of believers in First Century Turkey. They were far too interested in gathering riches and wealth, so Jesus told them to “*anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see*” (Revelation 3v18). Of course, they were not physically blind, but their lack of spiritual sight was a real problem if they were to continue as a group of believers.

Whether we see Jesus for who he really is, and want to look into the Bible for ourselves, or whether we say “I just can’t see it”, is entirely up to us.

Our physical eyesight is precious, but our spiritual sight potentially affects our eternal salvation. So if someone asks you, “what are you looking for?” – perhaps it’s worth considering the question from a spiritual perspective too!

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