

Eyes of the heart

Mike has been blind since birth. He sees life more vividly than most of us.

by [Peter W. Marty](#) in the [October 2023](#) issue

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(Photo by Motorion / iStock / Getty)

Mike has been worshiping at our church off and on for the last year. When he walks up on a Sunday morning, you can't miss him making his way with a white mobility cane. A friend accompanying him watches closely for uneven sidewalk cracks. Greeting him in the receiving line after church one day, I said, "Hi Mike, it's great to see you today."

“Well,” he said with his usual warmth, “it’s great to see you too, Pastor.” I bit my lip the second I heard him respond. Mike has been blind since birth. Why did I privilege sight in my exchange with a guy who can’t see? And, short of being polite in the face of a dumb comment, why did he speak of delight in seeing me?

We forget, as I did that day with Mike, how thoroughly we’ve enthroned sight in our culture. We overlook the ways we’ve given primacy to the eye as a way of knowing. Words and expressions associated with metaphors of sight equate knowledge and intellect with an ability to see. Hindsight, foresight, and insight are linked with understanding. We make observations, view proposals, look at options, survey the landscape, and envision alternatives. Do you see what I mean?

I arranged for a home visit to get better acquainted with Mike. He lives alone in a well-kept ranch house on a corner lot. When I knocked on the screen door, he invited me in, disappearing briefly to mute his computer which was reading the morning newspaper aloud. I noticed the battery clock on the kitchen wall keeping good time. Artwork hung above the floral sofa. Mike pulled two mugs from the cupboard and made coffee for us. We sat at the kitchen table and talked about life.

Melanoma has been messing with his body for the last ten years. He walked me through his journey with cancer, his treatment successes over the years, and a crisis that’s brewing from a new medication. Since his most recent chemotherapy drug had run its course, the oncologist prescribed a new one that turns out to be stripping Mike of some feeling in his fingertips. This is not welcome news. Reading braille, which is critical to his independence, has become frighteningly difficult.

We moved easily between hard topics and happy ones. “I just love to garden in the summer,” said Mike. “There are so many beautiful flowers. Did you see my gardens when you came in?” When this 59-year-old told me that he picks out his own flowers at the store and plants them himself, I was flummoxed. He didn’t hear my jaw drop; I think he saw it.

I’ve long been convinced that the New Testament is more concerned with how we see and what we notice than with what we believe. But I haven’t paid sufficient attention to Jesus’ steady interest in blind people and his hope for all of us to see truth with more than the eyes on our face. He’s constantly pushing his followers to poke beyond, below, above, around, and through whatever their eyes may be

glimpsing. In Frederick Buechner's well-known phrase, it's that gift of "seeing with the eyes of the heart."

Mike has this gift. It's why he could say to me, despite his blindness, "Great to see you, Pastor." It's also why his outlook is so optimistic and why flowers appear so beautiful to him. He has 20/20 vision in the eyes of his heart and sees life more vividly than most of us.

If the Lord can be patient with me, I'd like to grow this same acuity in my own heart.