

# Different Perspectives



This spider's web can be seen reasonably clearly. If we were looking where we were going, we would not accidentally walk into the web, but take a detour to avoid it.

The next picture is of the same web, taken a minute or so later, but from a slightly different place. The web is now less visible, and the background is clearer. We could easily walk forward and be caught in its sticky threads. The web has not changed, but what we see is different.



At times we might say to someone, "The way I see this issue (or event), is..." But after perhaps a passionate declaration, do we then ask the other person, "How do *you* see it?", and listen carefully to their reply? No person's view can be assumed wrong, even when two descriptions of the same thing are not only different, but also seem contradictory.

Different views or understandings of the same thing can be true, like the photos of the spider's web, but limited. What each person declares they see or understand, is influenced by what they actually see with their eyes (with or without glasses!), the particular physical place where they are, their knowledge, past experience and perhaps beliefs. When we are open to what another sees, we may have our views enriched or modified by their opinion.

In Mark 7:25-30, Jesus was seeking privacy in a house in Tyre, a seaport city of mixed races in Phoenicia, north-west of Galilee. Jesus was in an edgy place (as described in the last leaflet), a place where changes can happen. A local Gentile woman, also in an edgy or liminal place having broken through social, racial and gender barriers to come to Jesus, begged him to cast out a demon (epilepsy?) from her daughter. Jesus could have turned away and ignored her, but instead he engaged her in conversation. He replied to her as a Jewish man, and, using the image of a meal in a house where children are being fed and not dogs, he indicated that he was sent first to heal Jews not Gentiles. The woman answered from her position as perceived by a Jewish man, a despised 'unclean' Gentile woman, reckoned as a 'dog', *and*, as desperate for the healing of her daughter. She pointed out to Jesus that what he did also affected others present in the house. Developing Jesus' image, she described how dogs that might be under the tables of Gentiles, (but usually not of Jews), ate the crumbs children dropped on the floor. Jesus listened to her, and began to understand her perspective from her social position and her need. But that was not the end. Because of her words and belief in his power, Jesus acted, pronouncing her daughter healed and released from the demon that possessed her.

If we apply this interaction to our own lives in today's world, we could identify an impulse we might have to ignore someone trying to interrupt us when we are tired and want to be left alone. Particularly, when we regard that person as 'different' and inferior because of age, disability, race or gender. Do we think it important to make an effort to listen to and see things from the perspective of such people, and then respond by using our time and energy to help them?

When Paul described the Church as the body of Christ in 1 Corinthians 12, he made it very clear that all members are different and to be valued. We all look, think and act differently, as do the members of a physical body. The contributions of all are needed for the whole body to function well. If one of our legs decides that it is being ignored and of no use, and gives up standing and walking, we shall soon find ourselves limping and

the leg itself losing its muscle strength. Even our smallest toes cannot be disregarded as they assist our balance, walking and running.

Similarly, in any group of people, we need the different gifts of each person to become a united body working together for the good of all. When we are open to cross boundaries and listen carefully to the people we find there, we will learn more of the truth of life in our world, and will better understand, appreciate and serve others different from ourselves.

The value of sharing perspectives is experienced when, for example, we Christians gather to participate in Lenten Studies rather than doing them by ourselves. From others, we are very likely to hear ideas that are new to us and perhaps challenging. Regardless of who offers the information, we should not be quick to dismiss it. Helpful insights often come from unlikely sources and may widen our views, and enable us to better discern, and perhaps even heal, a troubling experience in our past.

All our different gifts, abilities and perspectives are needed to be used and developed if the Church is to embody a loving and compassionate Christ *in* the world and *for* the world. Also, society as a whole benefits when all people relate with respect and gratitude for the different contributions and perspectives of others. In such relationships, God's love begins to be revealed, and the reign of God is experienced by those involved.

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