

Fourth Sunday of Lent

A personal encounter

Be Opened ... to See



Jessica Laidler

"I was blind, now I see". This line from the Gospel immediately jumps out for me and I believe it does for many of us. This story from the Gospel of Jesus healing a blind man and returning his sight is a truly amazing miracle and a miracle of this significance is something that we may not think would ever happen to us.

That is what I believed, until it happened to me.

No, I was never physically blind, but it is true, that I did not see.

For my whole life, I have been raised a Catholic, I was baptised, I attended both a Catholic primary and secondary school, I received communion and attended Mass with my family almost every Sunday. But, despite all of this, for me personally, I still felt 'blind'. I had a longing for something more, as all of these things that made me feel formally a Catholic, didn't make me truly feel connected to God.

So, I searched and long story short, I ended up in Cambodia working for the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS for short). There is one particular story that I am going to share, because it was a moment that I felt God was standing right there in front of me.

It was probably a few months into my time in Cambodia and I was making a trip with the team out from Siem Reap towards the border of Thailand to visit a young woman who had lost both her legs in a landmine accident, who at the time had just given birth and due to the accident, her husband left her. She had no home, no income and a four month old baby to look after. Her name, was Srey-Pech, Pech meaning diamond. Now, this sort of thing and these accidents are and have been very common in Cambodia and it's not that I had been desensitised to this sort of thing, but by this stage it was a normal days' work.

We drove up to this rusty, old, tiny shed on the side of the road which was apparently her home. I was told then that Srey-Pech did not own this small shed or the land, but her neighbours let her use it because they felt so sorry for her.

Shortly after we arrived Srey-Pech came from down the road on her small wheelchair, carrying her adorable four month old baby. And as soon as I saw her, something hit me. I was first taken back by her

beauty and the fact that she was around the same age as me, but overall it was this immense feeling of astonishment. I was lost for words and I started to get teary. Now like I said, I had become quite used to seeing these sort of things, but for some reason this woman had the most profound effect on me to the point that I froze. We spoke to Srey-Pech and managed to convince her to come live at our sanctuary with her son and learn how to sculpt and sell them as trade. As we drove off her neighbour ran out sobbing, handing her \$50 USD and as we drove away I noticed Srey-Pech crying and holding her baby boy tightly. Months later, Srey-pech was living happily at our sanctuary and had learned how to sculpt and sell her creations. Her teacher said she was a natural and it took only a few lessons for her to learn. She was excelling, learning how to live on her own and feel positive about her future.

It took me a while to understand however, why this moment had such a profound effect on me. I now truly believe that on that day, when Srey-Pech came up to me, I was looking directly at Jesus Christ. In that moment Christ was there to open my eyes. Despite years of being a part of the Catholic faith, in that moment it was like I was seeing God for the very first time. In the Gospel when the Rabbi asks why the man was born blind, Jesus replies "neither this man nor his parents have sinned; he was born so that God's works might be revealed in him". In that moment that I experienced with Srey-Pech, God was revealed to me through her so that I could see.

To be honest, there have been so many times in my life when God was revealed to me, but I think the difference in this moment, was that I was finally open to see. I am reminded of what my Grandmother once said to me, we are all at different stages in our faith journey, some have seen and others are yet to see, some have and refuse to believe, others have seen but are in need to see again. Whatever stage you are at in your own journey, I ask you to be one thing. Open. Open to see when God is right there in front of you, like Christ was for me, through Srey-Pech.

I often ask, why then? Why that moment? I do not know... but, one thing I do know, that "though I was blind, now I see".