

Not everything is as it seems: Jesus goes to his own people and is rejected, finds no faith, no willingness, that is, to see things as they really are – to see himself as prophetic of God. This is not an uncommon occurrence: the lazy eye reads the landscape and the people, easily, skating the surface of the real rather than making an effort to see more deeply; relying on previous knowledge to make judgements rather than allowing new insights, new experiences to have their say. We do it all the time: a new cooker becomes an object of fear until all the right buttons are pressed and we wonder what all the fuss was about. So we live mostly on previous experience as a way of negotiating present survival, but it has a cost. We can dismiss large tracts of the truth as myth, as unreal, as supernatural imaginings, rather than as deep insights into the one reality we really are – it's the bane of the academic world as much as any other.

The received opinion for many years was that the jungles of South America and S.E.Asia were largely just that, with pockets of urban life, just like ours, only concentrated in tight, compressed communities. But a new ground-breaking radar reveals otherwise. '*Lidar*', as it's known, (an acronym for 'light detecting and ranging') 'allows us to strip away vegetation', says Damian Evans, one of the leading experts applying this method to tropical archaeology. 'Using a laser scanner attached to an aircraft, we carpet the terrain below us with pulses of lasers, collecting billions of points. Some bounce back from the trees, but others slip through, allowing us to build a model of what lies beneath.' (Guardian 22.6.21) And what lies beneath is a vast 'low-density urban sprawl' with lots of jungle and water courses and areas of cultivation in-between, not our model of a jungle at all, or of a city, but of a complex mix of both, where one informs and upholds the other.

And Christ stands among his people, or Ezekiel, or Paul and, like them, is largely misunderstood, conformed to the previous hopes and experiences of this people who remember him only as a carpenter or the son of a carpenter with all the expectations engendered by that: a Galilean, surrounded by a family as ordinary as any other, just like us; limited, culturally-bound, destined to live and die just like the rest of us. But what Lidar reveals, if only they would dare to use it, is a whole world of dignified possibility where what we think we are is but a shadow, a cover, for our true depth and meaning. In rejecting Jesus, or Ezekiel, or Paul, what we are doing is denying this depth in ourselves, which is – ironically, paradoxically – only made visible in weakness, is allowing the ground -breaking radar to reveal us as fully enfleshed human beings capable of sin. We would rather keep the forest cover in place and the illusion of tight, urban, competence, well-separated from the wilderness out there and the wilderness within. But, in facing our demons, we find that they're not as threatening as we thought. In accepting them, we come to know them as part of a much larger reality and the jungle as much more civilized place than we imagined. In facing our demons, we face our God – a God just like us in every way but sin, already out there in that jungle we so fear, at our service, turning weakness into strength.

Br John Mayhead
Monastery of Christ Our Saviour