

Most of us, for much of the time, are deaf to one another, and to ourselves, and so to God who mediates his love, his presence, through each one of us and, indeed, all creation. We're not present to one another in many ways: that constant desire to get on with the next thing, the curse of 'busyness', which means we are only half present to whoever assails us; the mixed blessing (or is it a curse?) of social media which demands attention at one remove rather than that face to face encounter which we happily forego; the book learning which leads us to know *about* people and the world and God but not to *know* people or the world or God, in itself; the various apps which can aid our journey from point to point but which readily de-skill us and make us blind and deaf to what is actually around us. I'm thinking there of watching two men navigate their way down from Hill Spinney to Turvey, using a hand-held GPS map, and never, as far as we could tell, looking up from it to observe their actual surroundings. They passed us within a few feet without, as far as I remember, even acknowledging our presence or, perhaps, knowing of it. Dead to the world; dead to others; dead to God. This is where the 'poor' – the deaf and the blind among them, the mentally disadvantaged and troubled, the sick and the isolated, can often trump the rich in their awareness of the world with more time, perhaps, and less money to spend, or apps to divert them or simply because of their need to read others well in order to survive. Many years ago we had a visit from two such individuals seemingly less able to enjoy the richness of the world through their seemingly limited physical and mental capabilities – but the one brought the other for healing, for an impediment of speech and in her spiritual life. They both found words difficult – not the sort to bring to a party, or a church- what use would they be? But they understood compassion and were able to communicate it to one another. Their search was genuine: they were open to change. And so Jesus can change them, can give them hope, can touch their hearts and minds. The one brought the other to a monastery because she'd visited often before and, although we did very little apart from provide her with a room, she knew this was a place where the silence was safe, where she could get away from all the other noises out there, and in herself, and find peace. Jesus sighs when the deaf man, with an impediment in his speech, is brought before him because Jesus recognises his need for acceptance, for love, for God – and the healing takes place because of this deep communication between them. Jesus hears where the deaf man 'is coming from' and the deaf man hears Jesus. The moral of the story is to listen.

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