Bishop’s letter – ‘It takes the whole world to know Christ’

Do you think a fish knows that it’s swimming in water? I’ve been reflecting on this question not because it’s some kind of Buddhist koan – of the type that asks ‘What’s the sound of one hand clapping?’ Rather it’s because I’ve been reflecting recently on questions of culture and world view. Do I see the world purely from the perspective of being who I am? (A 55 year old white Englishman who grew up in a small village in the 1970s.) If that’s the case, is what I see an accurate representation of the whole of reality? Might other perspectives be possible? If I could see the world through the eyes of others, might my vision be richer, wider, deeper? Like a fish that suddenly realizes that seeing can happen not only through water, but through air as well?

Seeing things from the perspective of others was something that Jesus did. An example of this happens when Jesus heals a centurion’s servant in Luke’s Gospel (Luke 7: 1-10). The centurion comes from a background and culture that’s entirely different to that in which Jesus grew up. Yet Jesus is blown away by the insight that the centurion has about who Jesus himself is. This leads Jesus to exclaim ‘I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith!’

The Diocese of Bath and Wells has a link with the five Anglican Dioceses of Zambia. There’s much to be celebrated in the friendship that we share: the joy and vitality of the Zambian Church, the opportunities our link offers to help some of the world’s poorest communities. But for me, the greatest gift we gain is the opportunity our link offers to stand in the shoes of others and to see the world, our faith, and the whole of reality from a different perspective.

A wise person once said to me ‘It takes the whole world to know Christ’. Our link with Zambia enables us to see more of the Jesus we share than we could ever hope to experience otherwise.

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