

It doesn't take much to completely change the way you see the world. Sometimes all it takes is the help of a different pair of eyes to show you where to find the glitter in the grunge, the sparkle in the unremarkable streets you trudge along every day; all it takes is someone else to show you what's been right in front of your eyes all along.

My mother thought she had seen Cambridge from all the angles there were to see, from the sublime to the ridiculous, over and over, there and back again; from hours spent on the park and ride bus to shopping trips beyond count; from the college chapel where her grandchildren sang evensong, to the registry office where her younger son contracted the civil partnership to the hospital ward where her husband died. That's a lot of the fenland city. Yet when she made friends with the manager of my grandfather's retirement home, she was introduced to a whole new place: the bank branch with the ultimate unassuming facade that hides a dazzling deco extravaganza within, the walk-past grubby-looking café that actually sells the world's best fishfinger sandwiches, the pigeon-spattered bench from which you can see into the college garden to the ancient gnarled tree that seems to defy both logic and gravity. Most of the time most of us sleepwalk blinkered through life only occasionally realising that world we notice is all surface and most of the real world is hidden, that there is so much more there than appearances would suggest, there is so much more to the world than what we usually see.

I've been in Beddington for just over six years now- almost long enough for some of you to start wondering if I'm leaving soon, whether in eager anticipation or dread I'm not sure. However. in those half a dozen years nobody has yet taken it upon themselves to take me by the hand and show me what the wonders of this place are- and that's not an invite, thanks. Instead, it has occurred to me that in fact I could be the fresh pair of eyes for your place of residence, help you notice what you never normally do.

Sounds good eh? Come on let's go. Let's find out what I have discovered about the place where you live that wasn't obvious when I first trotted down from the Far East of London. What have I learned that I can now share which might transform your view of what lies under your little patch of blue sky? What indeed. Here's some starter factoids.

Well geographically most of this parish is Beddington Park and Beddington Park, so I'm told, is geologically unique. The very ground you walk on is like nowhere else on earth. You didn't know that did you? Next time you take a stroll across the grass

why not take a moment to reflect on the fact that you are walking across a subsoil unique in the world, consisting as it does of 2% discarded roaches, 11% barbecue residue and 87% dog poo.

What else? In my first summer here I discovered that on a hot day with a gentle breeze blowing from the north west the car park at ASDA has an odour only otherwise experienced downwind of a pig farm the morning after curry night.

No? Well...

On a dark winter's night when you've had way too little sleep or way too much to drink I am assured that you can hear Bess Throckmorton kicking Sir Walter Raleigh's head around the churchyard: it's either that or the kids next door once again using the rectory fence for their footie practice.

Have a chat with a local and you'll discover that what you previously imagined was impossible isn't. Yes, it's even possible to be xenophobic about birds. It seems that what you thought was one of the absolute delights of this area— the fabulously exotic colours and cries of flocking parakeets— are apparently just the sights and sounds of a load of non-native foreigners come to steal our, erm, perches. I have bad news for the ornithological branch of UKIP: bird Brexit is never going to happen.

Just before you start making anonymous phone calls to the Sutton Guardian – again – here are some of the truly positive things I have discovered during my 73 months in Beddington. Surestart Children's Centres. Not unique to this area of course but what a great idea. Never having had to use one myself I was blithely unaware of their existence till we came to plan Messy Church. The astonishing dedication of schools for children with Special Educational needs- there are four of them in this parish, so it's difficult to miss. A little less piously, but uniquely local, there is the vista in the little park on Guy Road with the Wandle by your side and some rather inspired modernist low rise flats in front. It's good. Trust me.

However much you've seen of the world, however long you've lived here, the world is never as you think it is. It's much, much better than that.

Although we know that in theory it's a big world after all, for the sake of just getting on each day we have to assume that the world goes no further than what we can see, that if there's anything important, we probably know it. Though that's only ever an assumption, we do end up believing it. But it's just not true.

We all know that the mayfly has the briefest of times in the sun, just a single day to live, love and die, but we only know that because it's only the last day of the mayfly's life we see: the months pupating underground that constitute the overwhelming bulk of the mayfly experience never comes onto our radar. We think the mayfly lives one day because it's only that one day that we notice it.

That tiny creature which relies on being small and insignificant so we don't notice it. We don't notice it, yet inside it is a tiny furiously beating heart full of urgency for living fuelled almost entirely by the cake crumbs that Mondays @ St Mary's drops. Now just another victim of lockdown.

That drab looking bird with a brain the size of a pin head subsisting on a revolting diet of worms: inside its unfashionable breast are a thousand songs of aching beauty that, with a lifetime of vocal coaching, we will never ever be able to sing.

The world has hidden depths, there is so much more than appearances would suggest, there is so much more to the world than what we usually see. Because before and behind everything, beyond and at the heart of everything is God.

There are very few times in our lives when we really don't need any help to see this truth, when we really don't have to think about it. It might be as we watch, tend and nurture the child born premature, then we know instinctively the wonder behind the veneer of everyday, we can feel the Holy Spirit at work in the grip of his tiny hands. It might be as we get up before dawn on Easter morning and watch the world crackle to life and the parakeets squawk in the new day. It might be when we are holding tight the hand of our loved one as they let go of life. At such times we need no help to know the profound depths that lie just beneath the surface, we need no help to know there is so much more to the world than what we perceive.

At the Transfiguration - it constitutes the Gospel reading today- this truth was revealed to Jesus's disciples in the most astounding, profound and unforgettable of ways. Tromping with him up yet another mountain suddenly the veil disappears, the whole vastness of reality opens up before them, the hand of God behind and within everything is suddenly, brilliantly, radiantly clear. They are overwhelmed, they sort of get it and really don't get it because nobody can. And then the vision is gone and everything is sort of back to normal, but it isn't, it never really can be, ever again.

In our lives we will never see exactly what the disciples saw. But we can and do see the same thing, but differently. It's always there for us, if only we had the eyes to see. True, it would be impossible to live all of our life aware of the constant blaze of transfigured glory, but our lives can only be improved the more we are aware of the ultimate reality lying just behind the surface revealed at the Transfiguration.

What then is it that prevents us from seeing beyond the veil? What is it that stops us being aware of the transfigured truth? There are so many things: guilt, busy-ness, fear, cynicism, greed, religion. Sometimes religion can help; sometimes it thickens the veil.

In order to see that truth we need to learn how to do what only those few times in life comes without effort: we need to learn to see with our souls. That truly is life-long learning and baptism is enrolling in the class.

We live all of our lives within the reality revealed by Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration and, except for the briefest of moments, it remains always just over the horizon of our perception, tantalisingly beyond our grasp.

But we can come closer. Each time we pray we stretch that veil just that little bit thinner, each time we receive communion a little thread of the wool over our eyes is unravelled, each work of love we give or receive is another pinprick of light illuminating our hearts.

And then one day the veil will have gone and that glory will be hidden no longer. One day the veil will have gone and we will know that we have been held tight in God's embrace all along. One day the veil will have gone and we will see him face to face.