

## **More Than The Eye Can See:**

Based on a Sermon Delivered October 13, 2007\*  
in Memory of My Mother-in-Law,  
Marion Isobel Ross (nee MacGibbon), 1926 - 2007

The Rev. David Ewart

To begin, I want to say at the outset that I have a rather simple belief that there is more to life than meets the eye. More to reality than meets the eye. And when I say, "more to life than meets the eye," I don't simply mean there are also our hopes, dreams, beliefs, memories, and imaginations – though of course all of these exist and are more than the eye can see. But these are all mental activities that exist only inside our heads. What I mean is that I believe that there are real things outside of us; real things that are more than the eye can see.

For the past several hundred years we have lived in an era dominated by science. And science has given absolute authority to the eyes, and only the eyes, to know what is real. The only things that are real are the things the eye can see. And if the eye cannot see it, then it is not real unless the eye can see a reading on an instrument that is detecting and measuring what the eye can not physically see.

Now don't get me wrong. I am a great admirer and appreciator of science. It is amazing what science's insistence on only accepting what the eye can see has done for helping us understand our world. From the farthest edges of the universe as seen through powerful telescopes, to the smallest sub-atomic events detected by powerful instruments, science has helped us to see our world in a way that was not possible before. And it has helped clear away many false and mistaken understandings. For example, we now know diseases are not caused by spirits and demons, but by very small viruses, bacteria and genes that we can now see under a microscope. Thank God for science.

But I am not altogether convinced that seeing is the only way to know the world, the only way to know what is real. What is the scientific evidence that only the eye can know what is really real? Is there more to life than meets the eye? Richard Dawkins, were he here today, would probably snort a loud, caustic and sarcastic, "NO!"

But as I have already said at the outset, I don't "see" why we need to accept that only the eyes can know what is real. How about you? What do you think? Is there more to life than the eye can see?

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*\* I do not preach from notes, so this has been written down after the fact and has been somewhat modified in the process. Those who were there will recognize most of it, but may notice some additions and deletions from what was said that day.*

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If you believe, as science does, that only what the eyes can see is real, then we alive today have a very large problem with understanding what happened 2,000 years ago on that first Easter Sunday morning when Mary Magdalene returned from the graveyard where Jesus' body had been placed in a tomb carved out of a rock and told his other disciples, "I have seen the Lord!" What did Mary "see?" Today, we get into convoluted arguments trying to explain how what she saw was either "real" or an "illusion." But that's because we live in an age that believes only the eyes can know what is really real.

In Jesus' time, everyone knew that, of course, there was more to life than meets the eye. Reality was alive with unseen spirits, and discerning and truly knowing what the eye could not see was of utmost importance. So they could discuss very sensibly what Mary saw that first Easter morning. And if you read the Biblical story carefully, you will see that the events recorded there carefully address all the ways they knew one could be mistaken or tricked about things the eye could not see:

- Was this a hoax? No.
- Was this a mirage? No.
- Was this a ghost or phantom? No.
- Was this wishful thinking? No.
- Was this a hallucination? No.
- Was this a rare but not unknown case of someone thought to be dead, but who was actually only in a deep coma and startlingly awakens? No.
- Was Jesus somehow resuscitated? No.
- Was this mental illness? No.
- Was this a case of group hysteria? No.

No, this was a case of Mary catching a glimpse of the reality that the eye cannot see. What Mary saw was really real, but not the reality that the physical eye can see.

And the importance of that first Easter Sunday isn't merely that someone who was dead was now seen to be alive. If Mary had happened to be passing the graveyard that morning and had seen a complete stranger who had died in his sleep three days beforehand that would have been amazing alright, but not amazing enough that you and I would be here in this place today.

The importance of that first Easter Sunday is that it was Jesus who Mary saw. It was this same Jesus who had given them a glimpse of a whole new way to live. Or actually it was a whole new OLD way to live, since Jesus was helping them to know that the realm of God which Moses and the prophets of old has also made known wasn't wishful thinking, wasn't "pie in the sky when you die." No. The realm of God was really real, and it was "at hand." If they would reach for it, it was right there within their grasp.

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And it was a realm quite unlike the one they currently lived in – a realm of terror, fear and violence. Jesus had helped them to catch a glimpse of a realm the eye could not see – a reality of peace which flows from justice, of joy that flows from living rightly with our neighbours. It was this Jesus that those who rule by terror, fear and violence falsely arrested by means of bribery and trickery, and then tortured and brutally executed.

It seemed as though Jesus had been wrong. There was no other realm really. It had been an illusion, wishful thinking, not really real. But, amazingly, when Mary went to the graveyard that morning, it was Jesus whom she saw. Jesus who had shown them this glimpse of another realm the eye could not see, of a different reality, of a different way to live, of the realm of God, of justice, peace and love – it was this Jesus who not even the worst that terror, fear and violence could do, could kill and put an end to. Perhaps then Jesus hadn't been wrong; it hadn't been a delusion, a hoax, wishful thinking, not really real.

And beginning with her, the other disciples also came to test and trust what they had glimpsed was in fact really real. That in fact, what is really true about the nature of the universe is that terror, fear and violence cannot kill justice, peace and love. That this is not "faith," nor "belief," nor "religion." It is an insight into what is really real. An insight that cannot be seen with the eye. This is the insight of Easter. But is there more to life than meets the eye?

My wife, Catherine, showed me her mother's Bible. And, as a minister, it's a bit embarrassing to admit but Marion has read her Bible way more than I have, and way more carefully, thoughtfully and prayerfully. It is dog eared and filled with underlining, notes in the margins, and the front and end pages are filled with favourite verses, quotations and prayers. And it is clear from reading these that Marion too had caught a glimpse of the realm of God that is "at hand" – is within our grasp if we will only reach for it. A realm of justice and peace and love. A reality that the eye cannot see, not merely wishful thinking, not merely "belief." You have heard the family talk about how this glimpse of what the eye cannot see became a focus for Marion's life.

But what are we to make of Marion's life here today? We can no longer see her. She is gone from our sight and we will see her no more, hear her no more, touch her no more. Is that it? Is that all there is to Marion's life? Is there more to Marion's life than the eye can see?

If all we are doing today is gathering to celebrate Marion's life, to rejoice in our memories of her and to name the effects her life has had, we could more easily do that around kitchen tables and walks on the beach and over coffee at Starbucks. We don't need this pricey and antiquated building to remember Marion.

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And while this building exists as a place to remember Jesus, it is not a place just for memories, just for hopes, just for wishful thinking. This building is here to be a place where we too might test and trust the glimpse of reality that Mary and the other disciples learned from Jesus: that justice, peace and love are an enduring part of the fabric of reality and not even the worst of terror, fear and violence can end them. And more than this: that even though we die, yet shall we live.

I wonder what you make of that. Marion has died. Jesus says, "Yet she is alive." Is there more to Marion's life than the eye can see?

Richard Dawkins would say, "NO!" But as I said at the outset, I have a rather simple belief that the eye is not the only way to know what is really real. There is more to life than the eye can see.

And so, while I would far rather still be seeing Marion here today, still be seeing her sitting amidst her loving family, I side with Jesus: Marion has died, and yet she is alive. These words do not take away the reality of the loss and grief we are sharing today. But they do give us a glimpse of a reality that is also true. A reality that gave focus and spirit to Marion's living, and gives us assurance and hope now. And for this consolation we give thanks to God. Amen.

David Ewart,  
[www.davidewart.ca](http://www.davidewart.ca)