



SIEBENQUELL

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# **That world is good. Our seeing is broken**

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One biblical narrative I often return to is the story of the garden in Genesis 3, which is populated by the most interesting cast of characters: a cunning, manipulative serpent who whispers seductively until you grab what you're not hungry for; a woman who spends more time talking to a whispering serpent than to God or her husband; and a man who asks no questions until it's too late and then blames everything on his. It always fascinates me anew because it weaves into our hearts how a story of disaster is created in our world.

If we take this story seriously and take a closer look, if we look at it with a keen eye, we will realise that it focuses strongly on the way humans look at the world. The serpent makes the woman a very tempting promise: »Your eyes will be opened.« (v. 5) He also promises her that she will be able to see the world as God does: »And you will be like God, knowing good and evil.« This unlimited, all-encompassing vision is utterly tempting for Eve. However, it is a fiction, and it is inhuman.

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Gods view is unlimited, whereas an essential part of being human is to know that all our vision is partial and fragmentary. In his remarkable book, »The Gift of Asher Lev«, Chaim Potok describes an exchange between an old and experienced Jewish artist with a young Asher Lev, who seeks to reconcile his desire to be an artist with the old Jewish prohibition of artistically portraying God in any way. In my favourite moment of the book, he tells Asher Lev: »The seeing of God is not like the seeing of man. Man sees only between the blinks of his eyes. He does not know what the world is like during the blinks. He sees the world in pieces, in fragments. But the Master of the Universe sees the world whole, unbroken. That world is good. Our seeing is broken.«

How I love that line: »But the Master of the Universe sees the world whole, unbroken. That world is good. Our seeing is broken.« It leads me to compare the way Genesis describes the woman's way of looking at the world, with the earlier Genesis story of how God looks at the world.

God simply looks at creation: »God saw that it was good.« (Gen 1:10) God sees the good in each of his works of creation, he looks at them in their essence and not according to their purpose or pragmatic usefulness. But the woman looks at the fruit and considers it good because it is beautiful and pleasant to see and taste: »When the woman saw that the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eyes, and that it was desirable for obtaining wisdom, she took the fruit and ate it. She also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate it.«

This is the great tragedy of our fragmented, broken way of seeing. We tend to view creation not for its own sake, but for its value to ourselves. We see its pragmatic usefulness for our purposes. If it meets our needs, satisfies our hunger, or solves our problems, then it is good. God looks at the goodness of creation, not at its pragmatic usefulness for his purposes. This is also the way he looks at us. That is why he can look at Jesus in the Jordan and say: »You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased.« God looks at his own Son, just as he looked at the first creation. He sees the good, not the efficiency, the pragmatism and the possible usefulness for his plans. He sees the lovable in his Son before any achievement: before he preaches, teaches, or heals the blind, the deaf, the mute, the lame and the lepers. He sees one in whom he is well pleased before he raises the dead to life: be it the daughter of Jairus in her bedroom, the son of the widow of Nain from his bier or Lazarus from the grave.

We do not realise how distorted our way of seeing is when we presume ourselves to be the measure of all things. We tend to see everything as good or bad, depending on how it serves us, our purpose or our needs. Now we face the long days of summer. How will we see the world? Will we look at these days and see them as good? Or will they only be good if the weather is perfect, the journey is unencumbered, the motorways are unclogged, the children are perfectly behaved, the flight is on time and the resort is all inclusive? May God heal some of our broken way of seeing this summer.

**P. Erik Riechers SAC**

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