



The World Community for Christian Meditation

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Wednesday of Lent Week 4



*When the blackbird flew out of sight
It marked the edge
Of one of many circles*

(Wallace Stevens, Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird)

There are many ways of looking at anything. In Wallace Stevens' poem the verse above is the ninth way he had found of looking at a blackbird.

Great poetry often shocks us to a new level of wakefulness by drawing our attention to something so obvious we can't understand why we hadn't seen it for ourselves before. But when we try to put this new perception into our own words we come up with very flat sounding clichés.

True insights are delivered and interpreted in the package they come in. Truth is always embodied, however hard we try to make it abstract and pin it down like a dead butterfly in an exhibition case of 'timeless truths'. Truth is as embodied and temporal as we are but also lives in the transcendence that makes us fully alive, fully awake.

What is Stevens describing here? Perhaps the sense of a residue or a remnant of experience that remains after the main event has passed. The blackbird has gone out of sight but the person watching it is left with a vivid sense of the circle it had made in its flight. A presence in absence, in the empty air there is an invisible edge. But also there is the awareness of it being one of many circles in the air which were there and are still there.

This sensitivity of perception is not esoteric. It's just not always awakened. Meditation awakens perception and insights into ordinary life. It delivers the sense that not everything that is present is always visible and also that there is the vision of things unseen that we call *faith*.

Another subtle consequence of this awakened perception is an experience of beauty. If we're lucky, the refining and humbling process of Lent, given the reflective time it needs, should have produced a few of these by now.

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