

Training our eyes and ears

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Our firstborn son came into the world seven years ago with red hair, blue eyes and keen perception. We discovered this early on.

We'd be out for a walk and Jonah would start pointing and saying, "Woof, woof, woof!" (i.e., "Mama, Dada, over there, a doggie!"). We wouldn't see a dog anywhere, but he never lost his resolve. "Woof, woof, woof!" And sure enough, six, maybe seven blocks up, off in the distance we would see it: a big black poodle, or a cream-colored golden retriever. He was right every time. We were the ones without eyes to see.

He had trained his eyes to be on the lookout for dogs, planes, trains and big trucks, so he could see them all from far away. His ears, too: he could pick out barking and train whistles from the world's cacophony of sounds.

This is what we're called to do during the sweet season of Epiphany. We are called to train our eyes and ears to see and hear the glory of God all around us, to perceive that everything is radiant and resonant with the goodness of God, to realize afresh the truth of those words in Isaiah: "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light."

This isn't always an easy task. Frostbite and hypothermia threaten our homeless brothers and sisters as the temperatures continue to fall. Sex slavery runs rampant abroad and in our own backyards, and the blind cycle of violence in the Middle East goes round and round. Talk about a cacophony.

It's hard to believe that God's light and love and peace are overwhelming the world. It's hard to believe that the year of the Lord's favor has begun.

And yet as Christians we're called to train our eyes and ears. To see and hear the world through the eyes and ears of Isaiah and Jesus. To tirelessly search the horizon for the ways in which God is coming into the world, and to see that light is shining in the darkness—that God is at work bringing good news to the poor, proclaiming release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, letting the oppressed go free.

The signs may be off in the distance, or camouflaged by distractions. But they are there, we trust and pray—and by the grace of God, with the eyes and ears of faith, and with one another's help in congregations of looking and listening, we can and will perceive them.