

The other week I went for my annual eye appointment, the eye doctor I was seeing was *very excited* to show me this fancy picture of the inside of my eye. He pointed out my optic nerve, the main channel between eye and brain that makes sight possible. He told me that there are over a *million* nerve fibers in this tiny strand that all fits within something the size of a ping-pong ball. We both agreed: the biology of sight and seeing is nothing short of miraculous.

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Our story from Luke this evening is a story about sight and *seeing*. The story starts with ten lepers who approach Jesus when he enters their village. They see the one they think might cure them of their disease; and they cry out, "Have mercy on us."

It is then, as Luke tell it, "Jesus saw them," which gives us an interesting possibility: the fact that Luke writes, "*When* [Jesus] saw them, he said to them," means Jesus may have first passed them by. We have here the possibility that Jesus, the one who sees into the heart, could, like we do almost everyday, walk right past people without noticing them.

It's only after *seeing* the lepers that Jesus hatches the plan: "Go, show yourselves to the priests." Let the priests LAY EYES upon you. Let the temple leaders now SEE you.

This is a story about sight and *seeing*.

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The ten lepers faithfully follow Jesus' command, going to the priests, but one leper, "*when he saw* that he was healed, turned back." He turns back when he sees his healing, when he sees his skin clear for the first time in presumably a long time. When he notices, when he let what has happened sink in, when he truly sees, he reverses the direction he was headed, goes back, and thanks Christ.

Now, we likely don't have leprosy, but we do all have blemishes, spots, moles, mark, and scars, on our own skin that we can get so *used* to seeing, that we eventually overlook them. We know our blemishes and spots so well that we almost stop realizing they're there.

And what if all those blemishes, spots, moles, mark, and scars disappeared? What if the chronic progression of skin disease or age or acne ceased? What if the blemishes we thought were permanent were suddenly gone and our skin became smooth and clear?

Like the leper, we too might turn back. We too might prostrate at the feet of our savior and offer our thanks.

But we would only do that if we took the time to notice, to recognize, and to see.

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This story hinges on sight and *seeing*.

Like our divine savior makes the very *human* move of walking right past the lepers, there is a lot we too do not at first see.

We never see the inside of one another's churches, for one thing! This is the one time a year we gather and host and are hosted and worship outside our beautiful but often confining denominational silos.

We rarely see the people outside our own communities: people who go to other churches, attend other schools, identify as other races, speak different languages.

And like the lepers got used to seeing spots on themselves, like we learn to ignore our long-time blemishes. We can overlook people in our community, often people in need. Do we see our immigrant neighbors moving into North Chesterfield, the aging-in-place in its older neighborhoods, the empty storefronts and Title One schools?

Despite all those million nerve fibers God gave us, there sure is quite a bit we don't see.

But as Luke's story makes clear, *sight and seeing* make all the difference. God gave us millions of optic nerve fibers not just to see those in need around us but also to notice all the possibilities for healing and wholeness. As Christians, we are called to look with the eyes of Christ, not only to see the lepers in need but also to imagine plans for their healing. For when the eyes of Christ view adversity, they do not see the danger of failing but an opportunity for growth. When the eyes of Christ glimpse the poor they do not see a demand to fix but all the gifts to share. When the eyes of Christ spot a foreign neighbor, they do not see an enemy but a friend.

And for Christ, it's not enough just to observe these things. No, Jesus sees the people and circumstances and responds to them. And having been responded to with compassion and grace, the leper sees himself made new and gives thanks.

Tonight, before Thanksgiving, we have this collective moment away from the hustle and bustle of meal preparations and travel...we have a moment to see. To truly see and respond and give thanks.

Jesus and the leper and the story from Luke invite us look around this Thanksgiving. What will we see on your way home this night? What will you see around your table on Thursday? Whom or What have we overlooked? What or Whom needs our response? What will make us turn around and go back and give thanks?

For with God, sight and seeing are nothing short of miraculous.
AMEN.

Rev. Kathryn L. Pocalyko
November 21, 2017
Hull Street Christian Fellowship Thanksgiving
Service

Walmsley Boulevard United Methodist Church
Luke 17: 11-19