

February 11, 2024

**The Acts of the Apostles**  
**V. Seeing, and the Power to Heal**  
**Acts 3:1-16**

Dr. William P. Seel  
Easley Presbyterian Church  
Easley, South Carolina

I remember my pastor and mentor, Dr. Oswald Delgado, telling me that, as he looked back over his many years of faithful ministry, what troubled him the most were not the things he had done wrong, but the good things he had left undone. I have now been doing this long enough to understand the truth in what he said. In fact, there is a particular sin of omission, a thing not done, which haunts me from time to time. And, since we are about to enter the season of Lent, the season for confronting and confessing our sins – it seems as good a time as any to tell you this story.

It was very early in my ministry, while I was serving my first congregation in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania. The church sat up on a hill overlooking Lee Park Road and the Lee Park Volunteer Fire Department. My office was at the far right end on the main floor of the building. The only restrooms in the church were down in the basement at the far left end of the church. We only had a very part-time secretary, so most days I was there by myself. And I had actually been told by the Session that if I needed to use the restroom, before making that long trek downstairs and across the entire building, I should lock the two glass doors at the front of the building.

Here's what happened. One afternoon, I was there by myself and needed to use the restroom. I went to lock the two glass front doors. Now, even though the doors were glass, I had not seen him as I began to turn the key in the lock. But there was a young man, mid-twenties like me at the time I would say, coming up the steps to the doors. He was not a church member, and I had never seen him before, but as I was turning the key in the lock, I looked down and saw him coming up the steps just as he looked up and saw me locking the doors in front of him. His face suddenly registering disbelief and anger that I was locking the doors – because to him it had to have looked as if I was specifically locking the doors in order to specifically keep him out. But that, of course, was not my intent – there were a lot of steps and there were rather steep and I truly had not seen him before I turned the key.

No, my sin was not in locking those doors – rather it lay in what I did next. Or rather – and this is what haunts me to this day – in what I didn't do next. As his eyes met mine – the anger and disbelief that I was apparently locking him out personally written all over his face – I didn't then unlock the door, explain and apologize, and let him in to speak with me about whatever it was that had drawn him up those steps to the church that day. Once I saw him, I didn't unlock the door. I turned away and descended the interior stairway to the restroom in the basement.

It pains me to this day – especially, I think, because I am left wondering what harm I might have done to his faith in Christ by my act as Christ’s representative. And because I am left wondering what good I might have been able to do for him if I had just unlocked the door. But mostly, I think, it haunts me because I don’t really understand why I turned away instead of unlocking the doors. The best insight into that which I have found over the years comes from a story Jesus tells in the Gospel of Luke (and remember that Luke is also the author of the book of Acts). It’s the story of the Good Samaritan.<sup>1</sup> Remember, a man is traveling over a lonesome road, robbers fall upon him and beat him and leave him wounded beside the road. A priest comes by, sees the man lying there, and keeps on walking. A Levite comes along, sees the man lying there, and keeps on walking. And then the Samaritan comes along, sees the man just as the other two had seen him – but with one crucial difference. This story had begun with a lawyer asking Jesus who are the neighbors he has to love as himself, as the second great commandment requires.<sup>2</sup> In other words, this lawyer was asking Jesus whom he could ignore and still keep up that commandment.

So, again, the Samaritan comes along, as had the other two; he sees the man lying there – and then, the critical part of the story, recognizes the man as one he is commanded to help, his neighbor. Recognizes him as someone for whom he is intended to care, should care. This is exactly how Jesus puts it in His telling of this story: *“But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion.”*<sup>3</sup> In other words, the Samaritan didn’t just see the man with his eyes, but also with his head and heart – and he recognized this man as his neighbor under God’s heaven. The priest and the Levite saw this man with their eyes only – not with their heads and their hearts. They didn’t see him with compassion, as someone who was the neighbor they were to care for and to help. The Samaritan saw him with his eyes – and then his head and his heart recognized this man as someone to be loved, to be tended to, to be cared for in God’s name. And Jesus ends that story by turning to the lawyer who had posed the original question about who was his neighbor and who was not – Jesus ends by saying to that lawyer, *“Go and do likewise.”*<sup>4</sup>

And that, I think, was my failing that day so long ago. I saw the young man climbing up the steps – I saw him with my eyes. But I didn’t see him with the head and the heart of faith and love. I didn’t see him through the eyes of Christ. Though he was a complete stranger to me, my failing was that I didn’t recognize that, nonetheless, he was my neighbor.

Now why am I telling you this story? Well, it has everything to do with hearing and understanding our reading from Acts this morning – this story of Peter and John healing the man lame from birth. Note how the story begins, with the description of the lame man. He was a) been lame from birth; and b) every day, for years, his friends have carried him to the same spot by the Beautiful Gate in the Temple, from where he begs passersby in the Temple for coins. Picture that. He’s lying there every single day, same spot, same pitch for coins. I suspect that to many who frequented the Temple, he was just an annoyance to be walked past briskly. To others, perhaps, he was more like an old piece of furniture – seen, but no longer really noticed in any conscious way.

But look at what happens next – specifically, look at how much “looking” and “seeing” is described in this healing story. The lame man sees Peter and John going into the Temple and makes his usual appeal for alms. And what do Peter and John do? They stop and they look at the lame

man: “*And Peter directed his gaze at him, as did John.*” And what Peter says next indicates that both he and John are seeing this lame man, not merely with their eyes, but with their heads and their hearts. That they have seen him, but also recognized him as a neighbor Jesus has commanded them to love. Peter says to the lame man, “*Look at us.*” And the lame man now fixes his eyes upon them, truly seeing them. Peter says to the man, “*I have no silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!*”

*And he took him by the right hand and raised him up, and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong. And leaping up he stood and began to walk, and entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God. And all the people saw him walking and praising God, and recognized him as the one who sat at the Beautiful Gate of the temple, asking for alms. And they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.*

So this healing happened, was made possible first and foremost, simply because Peter and John didn't just see the lame man with their eyes, but also with their heads and hearts. They saw him as the neighbor Jesus had commanded them to love. How many people passed by that man every day, year after year, seeing him and yet not seeing him. Seeing him, but not seeing him as someone who mattered, someone whom they should consider and care about, someone for whom they should stop and try to help? Peter and John see him, but more than that recognize him – and a mighty miracle of healing, in the name of Jesus Christ, is done.

There is so much more in this passage that we could talk about. The reaction of the crowd, Peter's sermon to the crowd after the healing, even just the question of whether or not we, in our day, can still do such miraculous healings as Peter and John did that day. All interesting and worthy topics. But all of Luke's emphasis on looking and seeing as he tells this story – the lame man looks at Peter and John, Peter and John look at the lame man, the lame man is told to look again at Peter and John – all of that emphasis on looking and seeing so powerfully echoes that story Luke had previously recorded about Jesus telling about the Good Samaritan. And all of this looking and seeing, therefore, pointing us to back to the simple truth of that story as well: that Jesus Christ can and will use us to bring healing to others in His Name – but only if we are first willing to look at those others not just with our eyes, but with our heads and our hearts also.

We, too, can be used by Jesus, in the name of Jesus, to bring help, even healing to others. Maybe not such miraculous healings as “rise up and walk” – such miracles then and now are very rare. But healing, helping, nonetheless. In the Name of Jesus Christ, you and I can indeed be instruments of healing to those in need, vessels of mercy to those who are struggling, conduits of hope to those who are flailing. For the same Holy Spirit which worked through Peter and John that day is even now seeking to work through you and me – in the Name of Jesus, to bring help and wholeness and healing to those who are in need. As one writer put it: “*Faith opens all the windows to God's wind*”<sup>5</sup> – meaning God can and will use us to reach others with His grace, peace, power, and love. If we will but see others with our heads and our hearts, and not our eyes only. Seeing, the Holy Spirit can work through us to bring spiritual, physical, emotional, relational healing into the lives of others.

And here's how I now that this is so – aside, of course, from the fact that the Bible tells me so. Let me tell you another story, one which also happened in my first church many years ago. A woman, let's call her Debbie, came to my office one day. She didn't have an appointment, I didn't know she was coming – I just looked up and there she was, because I didn't lock the church doors on that day. I had not met her before; she was not a member of the church. What she was, however, was in deep trouble – and the panic and the pain were written all over her face. She had been out of prison for a couple of weeks she told me. She had been arrested and served considerable time in prison for drug possession and solicitation. She admitted she was guilty of both those crimes, but that she had cleaned up in prison, and really wanted a new life for herself. But two things were standing in her way. Her old boyfriend, a drug dealer, was trying to draw her back into her old life. And the local police were threatening her with more jail time if she would not wear a wire and help take him down – which she knew would probably result in her ex-boyfriend killing her if he found out. She was caught in a terrible place and was genuinely afraid for her life. She was desperate to escape her past in order to get to a better future; but she had no idea in that present moment of how she was ever going to be able to do so. She broke down in tears. She sobbed so deeply and hopelessly that at one point I was actually worried if she was having a full and complete breakdown.

I don't know why Debbie chose to come to me that day. I suspect it was simple proximity – we were the closest church to the housing project where she lived. But I do know that this time the Holy Spirit made sure that I saw her – that I was looking at her not just with my eyes, but also with my head and my heart. That I saw her as a neighbor I was to help. And I know that – I know that it was the Holy Spirit that day – because only the Holy Spirit could have given me the right words to say to her. I was in way over my head, and we had for sure never talked through this sort of scenario back in seminary. So it had to be the Holy Spirit which told me what to say next – I believe that with all my heart. Because these are the words God put in my mouth – before we even started to try to talk about her situation and what to do – the Spirit told me to speak these words: “Debbie,” I said, “*the first thing you need to know is how much God loves you.*”

But she didn't even let me finish that sentence. She interrupted, “*No, no! How could He love me after everything I have done and the mess I have made of my life?*” So I repeated it to her: “*Debbie, God loves you – no matter what. In spite of everything you have done. You are a child of God and you are precious in His sight. He loves you.*” She calmed down a bit, the sobs turning to silent tears. And after a moment, she asked me, “*Are you sure? How do you know?*” So we looked at Scripture together, and I let her read about God's love for her for herself. And then we began to talk about her situation and what we could do to help her. And then I prayed for her. She held my hand so tightly I still remember how much it hurt. But it was, for her, a new beginning. A moment of healing. Simply for her to know that she was not an untouchable in the eyes of the Lord – that she was loved by God, desired by God, forgiven by God – and could be brought into a better place through the grace and power of God.

And the story continues from there. I worked with Debbie to make a plan. I called the police detective and talked with him – I basically just did what I could for her, helped her find a safe place to stay, and so on. And basically, it turned out okay. She made it through that period okay, stayed off the drugs, begin building a new life for herself. But that's not even the best thing, the most healing thing, which happened next. Debbie started attending worship at my church a

few weeks after I first met with her. Which meant that the members of that congregation were suddenly confronted with a former drug dealer and prostitute sitting in the third pew on the right every Sunday. Those dear souls in that church weren't quite sure what to make of this, but they didn't just look at her, gawk at her – they saw her as their neighbor too. And they welcomed her, they embraced her, they loved on her, they lifted her up in their prayers, they helped her out financially and in other ways, and just in general they made her a true part of the fellowship of that church. Whenever you get the chance to see a bunch of Christians doing something as truly Christian as that – well, it is one of the most beautiful sights you will ever see.

And through that new relationship with His Body, Jesus continued to bless and strengthen and to heal Debbie's life. Through those dear souls, He kept on healing her – making her stronger and leading her into a new life. When I left that church a year or so later, Debbie was doing so much better – and I knew I was leaving her in good hands. I went back and visited the church a few years later – they had elected Debbie to be a Deacon. They saw her through the eyes of Christ – and Christ, through His Holy Spirit, used them to heal her and to make her whole.

*Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayers, the ninth hour. And a man lame from birth was being carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple that is called the Beautiful Gate to ask alms of those entering the temple. Seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, he asked to receive alms. And Peter directed his gaze at him, as did John . . .*

*But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion.*

Seeing, and the power to heal. Let us go and do likewise.

---

<sup>1</sup> Luke 10:25-37.

<sup>2</sup> Luke 10:25-29.

<sup>3</sup> Luke 10:33.

<sup>4</sup> Luke 10:37.

<sup>5</sup> George MacDonald, Diary of an Old Soul, quoted in Frederick J. Gaiser, Healing in the Bible (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), p. 207.