

Really Seeing Each Other
The Monroe Congregational Church, UCC
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Acts 3:1-10

Last week, you might remember that we were hanging out with the disciples, who had returned to the upper room of Jerusalem, and were waiting on the Holy Spirit to come so they could actually DO something about the needs of the world right outside their door.

Their job, once they were released from their time of waiting, was to be witnesses in Jerusalem. And the first thing two of them will do, is an act of mercy.

So here's how it all went down... Peter and John are on their way to worship at the Temple. It's something they've done before, and something they'll do again, just part of the ongoing rhythm of life.

Maybe you've felt this way before... you're on your way somewhere, maybe you're late, rushing on the way. And you encounter someone on your path who is holding a mug, shaking it, asking for coins. They are clearly in need, but all you have on you is your debit card in your pocket, so you avoid this person.

It's not that you don't want to give them something, it's just that you don't have anything on you that you can easily give. And maybe you're a little embarrassed, because you consider yourself a giver.

You can't meet their gaze, because saying to their face that you can't help is just too painful. Nothing about this need, or this interaction, is the way the world should be.

Anyway, Peter and John have one of these moments, just as they arrive outside the Beautiful Gate. They see this man who has been unable to walk on his own for over 40 years, and he's shaking his cup, asking for help. But they have no money in their pockets to give him. 40 years is a really long time.

It's a long time to depend on your family's support, because in that culture there were no jobs available for a person who couldn't stand or walk on their own.

40 years is a long time to ask your friends to carry you to the place where you might be able to beg strangers for what you need.

It's not like the community completely ignored this man in need! They brought him, every day, to a crowded place with enough foot traffic that he had at least a fighting chance to find help. So there he was, waiting to see if the people who were walking by were in a generous mood or not.

Peter and John didn't go looking for someone to heal, and yet, the opportunity still presented itself to them. It's like being a part of our church... opportunities to serve others

present themselves to us all the time. We see a need; we determine that somehow we're going to help alleviate that need.

This time of disruption is no different.

Early in March, I let people know that my daughter, who works in a mental health facility, needed fabric masks, because her employer was unable to provide any and her clients were beginning to become sick with the virus. Later that day, I had no less than 4 members of our church community ask me how many she needed and when. And now, one couple from is busily sewing and will be shipping to me a supply that I can share with those in need. Incredible generosity.

People in our broader community are getting creative too, with signs supporting our healthcare workers, first responders and essential workers. They are finding safe ways to celebrate children's birthdays with parades. Storytellers and musicians are offering their gifts online to bring hope to kids who are safe at home.

It's kind of like, in many small ways, we are seeing each other for the first time.

Which brings me back to the story from Acts. Peter and John are out in the world, they encounter someone in need, and they treat him like a human being – deserving of all the dignity they'd give to anyone. They look him in the eyes. They see past his immediate need. They imagine the transformative possibilities that could be in his future, and they restore him to health. In Jesus' name.

Of course, I'm sure the man was grateful for all the people who were generous with him and gave him money to get back over the last 40 years. I mean, how could he have survived otherwise, without their help?

And when think about what it is we have to give, in this moment of uncertainty, it may not be a lot of money. And despite our fervent prayers, we may not be able to help bring about any miraculous healing. But think about what we DO have to give – time, compassion, empathy, support.

The people at the temple are incredibly curious... how did this man, who they have walked past every single day on their way to the temple, regain the ability to walk? And what might it have been like to see him not just walking, but DANCING with joy?

It turns out that people are drawn to that kind of mercy. It's such a simple thing to do, just to look at a person. Treating them like one of us. It turns out that being Jesus' witnesses in the world is more than anything about repairing the rupture between people – forming connections.

Healing starts when there are no distinctions insiders and outsiders, and we learn that we are all in this together. The possibility of transformation increases as we build relationships, and come to understand the reality of real people out there for whom the world is not a friendly place. May it be so, and may it be soon. Amen