



When you look at this picture, what do you see? For some of us, our first impression may be that of a duck or other similar bird. For others, they see a rabbit.

Here's another similar example. This one is probably even easier to see than the other image.



What about this one? What is your first impression of what this is a picture of? A lot of us probably see a young woman wearing a fancy hat, with her head turned. Yet if you look a little closer, you can also see a much older woman with a prominent jaw and nose, also wearing an elaborate hat.

I share these pictures this morning to illustrate that our perspective, how we look at things, can affect what we actually see. Often if we look closer, we see something entirely different than our initial impression at a casual glance, or as our song earlier stated, "from a distance." These illustrations are intentional illusions, but how often in our real lives do our own points of view affect not only how we see something, but even how we remember something.

There have been so many occasions in my own life where I reminisce with someone about an event we attended together years prior, and I'm amazed at how much my memory of what transpired differs from their recollection. We all view what we encounter in life from our own point of view, and it can affect which details we notice, and which ones avoid our radar. Both of our lessons this morning present different themes of perspective.

In our first story, Namen travels to receive healing remotely from the prophet Elisha while in our gospel lesson, Jesus heals ten lepers who are standing far away from him and all others. In both cases, the victims suffer from leprosy. Leprosy in the ancient world included a number of skin diseases that were determined to make one “unclean.” As such, you were forced to stay away from other people, and they were forced to stay away from you. For you to come into contact with someone who was not infected would be to make them ritually unclean as well. So if you found yourself in this circumstance, you would be outcast from society, forced to live at the margins, outside of cities and towns, with no means to earn a living. You would depend on the charity of others whom you couldn’t even get close to actually receive the handout directly. Food might be left at the city gate; coins may be tossed in your direction. The only way out was to be healed and have that healing verified by a priest, then ritually bathe and make the appropriate sacrifice. Yet the odds were still potentially stacked against you. The person making said judgement was not a physician or trained in any way in the recognition or treatment of disease. You were left to the whim of the clergy, who in that day were not always known for their scruples.

Yet in both stories, the main character suffering from this affliction is a Gentile, not even one of the chosen to whom all these rules apply. They already have a strike against them by being Gentiles. Yet both are acknowledged and healed by God regardless. Both Elisha and Jesus see past the distance others would put between themselves and these men. When they heard or saw them, they didn’t put them at a distance; they didn’t assign them to a category as “unclean leper: and simply dismiss their need. They saw them as individuals: individuals with real needs and real pain. They both provided relief for that pain. And what was the ultimate result? Gratitude. Plain and simple. They both rejoiced in the power of God to heal them, but more importantly, to provide salvation. In our gospel story, Jesus tells the Samaritan man that his faith has made him well. Yet the Greek word used here can also mean salvation. So not only has his faith healed him, but it has saved him. It’s also interesting that in our second story, the only one of the ten healed that turns to express gratitude is the Samaritan, one who is already an outcast. The presumption is the other nine are Jews, who head off to the priest to get their clean bill of health, and rejoin the “clean” club and become part of society again. Their gain is likely immediate and substantial. They can retake their place in commerce and culture. Yet they don’t even cast a backwards glance. Whereas our Samaritan friend falls to his face at Jesus’ feet in a grand display of gratitude.



So what is our perspective? Are we farsighted? When we see the outcasts of our time, do we look at them from a distance, put them in the appropriate category of stereotype, and go about our daily business? There are plenty of modern day lepers to choose from: the homeless, the drug addict, the refugee or immigrant, the transgender, the person of color, the list goes on and on. Do we see the category or do we see the individual?

Like the characters in our stories today, we have all been “made well,” saved by grace. How do we share that grace with others? Do we show our gratitude or do we simply take the gift and go back to our normal lives, like the nine in our gospel story today? Being grateful is at the heart of God’s hope and intent for each of us. There is evidence that Jesus knew exactly what he was talking about.

In 2006, there was a Web launch by the website WebMD called “Boost Your Health with a Dose of Gratitude.” The essay cited thousands of years of philosophical and religious teachings urging gratitude and then cited new evidence that grateful people, for whom gratitude is a permanent trait, have a health edge. It may be that grateful people take better care of themselves, but there is evidence that gratitude alone is a stress reducer, that grateful people are more hopeful, and that there are links between gratitude and the immune system. Being grateful makes you healthier and gives you a better quality of physical health. So how do we inspire that gratitude in others, and ourselves?

Well, sticking to the theme today, it all comes down to perspective doesn’t it? We can choose to be short-sighted, only focus on our own problems, and keep the suffering of others at a safe distance, separated from us, outside the walls. We can pine for a better health and life and wallow in our own self-pity. Or we can be grateful for the many blessings we have. We can see those on the margins, those who are the outcasts of today, as individuals in need of blessings to be grateful for, in need of being “made well.” The question is, are we willing to reach out and go from being farsighted to seeing them close-up, as equally beautiful creations of the same God who made us?

If Jesus can reach out and change the life of the lowest of the least of these of his time, surely we can adjust our focus to seek to change the lives of the outcasts of our world. Surely we can share the graceful, or “grace-filled” gratitude we have with those who yearn for the change that grace can cause. We choose what perspective we use the view the world. I pray we choose the one that sees the face of Jesus in everyone, because there are no outcasts in his kin-dom. Amen.



