

MESSAGE - "Seeing Eye to Eye"

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Does it seem to you that we look at each other less when out in public places? I feel like this is the case. Maybe it's the whole mask thing.

And if that's true, it is sad because there is power in eye contact that is an integral part of the human experience – from the very beginning of life. I'm not talking about staring someone down. I mean making eye contact with another human being.

It's important:

Makes people feel noticed and recognized

It can make people feel valued.

It can show that you are listening/paying attention to someone.

It is a basic form of making emotional and relational connections with others.

Yet as important as it is, there are some situations in which eye contact is avoided.

- In the grocery store....I'm there to get my items and be on my way just like everyone else. Making eye contact doesn't happen much.
- When someone is from another background or ethnicity we might feel less comfortable making eye contact.
- When someone is doing something we don't approve of or saying something we disagree with, it's harder to make eye contact. "look away...."
- Certainly when someone on the street wants something from us....may be even less of a possibility.

In that situation, eye contact may leave the beggar feeling shame. It may lead to the passerby feeling conflicted over whether to give something. Avoiding eye contact – and thus avoiding making a connection - makes it easier to just go by.

Today's story shares an encounter that goes a whole different way.

Acts 3:1-10

One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer—at three in the afternoon. ² Now a man who was lame from birth was being carried to the temple gate called Beautiful, where he was put every day to beg from those going into the

temple courts. ³ When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money. ⁴ Peter looked straight at him, as did John. Then Peter said, "Look at us!" ⁵ So the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them.

⁶ Then Peter said, "Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk." ⁷ Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man's feet and ankles became strong. ⁸ He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God. ⁹ When all the people saw him walking and praising God, ¹⁰ they recognized him as the same man who used to sit begging at the temple gate called Beautiful, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.

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It's right in the heart of this story that it happens.

The man who is lame and begging knows they are there, but doesn't really look at them. To him, they are another possibility of a source of money....people who love God enough to be going to prayer. His hope is that they just might love God enough to love their neighbor as well and help him out.

And then there's Peter and John who would give him money if they could, but they can't. They're broke themselves.

This could be one of those situations where people pass by and everyone feels bad afterward. The beggar feels bad, perhaps judging them as unfaithful. Peter and John walk by feeling bad because they can't help but they don't want to be seen as not wanting to help because they're not able to help....

But then it happens: eye contact. Peter says to the man, "look at us!"

And the man "gave them his attention".

In the Greek it means: "atenizo" which means to look intently. They make eye contact. There is now a connection.

And what happens next is the way I want to live in Eastertide; how I want to live every day:

I want to live like Peter and John: Who look someone in the eye and know and proclaim that there is new life for them in the name of Jesus.

In this man's situation: who has been born lame. His life is a daily struggle. He lives at the mercy of people giving alms. He needs help to get to the place where he begs.

But lameness is not just an inability of the body. Being lame in a general sense means to be lacking or in want.

We might connect with being lame on different levels:

It could be a self-esteem issue, when we lack the ability to believe in ourselves

It could be a spiritual issue, where we lack the belief in God's love.

In any life situation that might leave people lacking or in want, what might it mean for us to look someone in the eye and say: "in the name of Jesus Christ, walk"

It means to be like Peter and John, knowing in your core that there is power in the name of Jesus.

It means claiming that the power that brought Jesus from the grave is available for us to live by.

It means declaring, no matter what, that living a new life is possible.

Yes, I want to live like Peter and John.

But I also want to live like the beggar. He receives that message so much that he reaches out to Peter's hand.

I think this is huge. He's been living like this (lacking and in want) for so long, that he might just laugh and turn away. He could turn a hard heart to extended hand. He could be like Thomas and first say "prove it".

But he doesn't and that's how I want to live:

I don't want to say "you don't know what you're talking about" when someone reminds me Jesus loves me.

I don't want to refuse to receive the gift of forgiveness and mercy

I want to reach out and hold onto the belief that God's love is more powerful than anything.

Friends – this is Eastertide. A season of celebration. A season that calls us to make eye contact with the Risen savior – through each others’ eyes – and live a new life “in the name of Jesus Christ.”

So friends – do you have a place in your life that is lacking or in want?

As you think on that, let us hear the words of Peter and John so long ago speaking to us down through the years: “In the name of Jesus Christ, walk!”