

too...we want to say that we are here - we love our land and our home.”³ The eyes are inviting people to fully see the realities in that holy and troubled place, and to be moved toward wholeness and just outcomes.

To be seen by one another is powerful. Sometimes, it is the only thing that saves us.

To be seen and saved by God is something we can always count on, and something that always has the potential to transform us.

To see the world clearly is to be changed by what we see. When we see God’s truths through the touch we share, through the feeling of our hearts expanding and then sometimes breaking, through the meal Christ hosts - all of that opens us to the reality of God’s ways in the world, which are so different from how humans often function. God’s ways are built on community and trust; love and reconciliation; generosity and faithfulness. May we see God’s ways more clearly than anything else. And may we choose to live by what we see, just like the blind man did and Zacchaeus did.

All glory and honor, thanks and praise be to God.



First Presbyterian Church
of Royal Oak

April 6, 2025
Fifth Sunday of Lent
“Seeing and Salvation”
Luke 18:31-19:10
Rev. Emma Nickel

Seeing clearly comes in many different forms. And doing so, does not always require eyesight. Meenakshi Gupta is one of thirty blind women in India who have been trained as medical tactile examiners.¹ Gupta and her colleagues perform tactile breast exams, using their hands to find even the tiniest lumps, sometimes before they would even show up on a scan. Research has shown that people without sight often have a heightened sense of touch. Through specialized training, these women’s fingers are able to feel and discern what even doctors often cannot find. Gupta’s findings then allow doctors to diagnose and treat women. In a country where there is not enough access to mammograms, and where breast cancer outcomes are much worse than in Western countries, Gupta’s work is essential. With her gentle and wise fingers, Gupta ‘sees’ what others cannot and offers a blessing toward health and wholeness.

The blessing has not only been for the patients though. In Indian society, visually impaired women have been a ‘forgotten lot.’ They often struggle to find appropriate work. The medical tactile examiner program offers training that results in a good job, and also gives them mobility skills and equipment to help the women navigate to and from their offices. This form of seeing with their hands has provided dignity and purpose for their lives. Which is perhaps its own kind of salvation.

In these stories in Luke, people wanted to see with their eyes; though they began to see with their hearts. In this passage, there was a lot of seeing and not seeing; there was being seen and not seen. Not only for the blind man who was begging beside the road. Also, for the disciples who, yet again, heard what was going to happen to Jesus in Jerusalem, but who could not see his meaning at all. And then, for Zacchaeus, who could not glimpse Jesus, until Jesus saw him. All of these accounts, just like the women in India, stretch our understanding of what it means to see and to be seen.

The stories of these two men who wished to see Jesus run in parallel. Neither of the men could physically see Jesus, but for different reasons. The first man had a physical reason: his eyes wouldn’t allow him to see. This difference had put him on the outside of his ancient community, where he was begging and asking for help just to find his next meal. When he heard who was passing through, he called out to Jesus. He used a title that signaled

¹ Kamala Thiagarajan, “Women who are blind play a critical role in identifying possible breast cancers,” Sept 8, 2024, NPR, <https://www.npr.org/sections/goats-and-soda/2024/09/08/g-s1-15690/breast-cancer-tumors-women-blind>

² [https://www.iwitnessilwan.org/](https://www.iwitnesssilwan.org/)

his heart actually could already see something of who Jesus of Nazareth was; something that even the disciples could not see. By calling him 'Son of David,' the man implied that Jesus was King, or something close to it. He knew that Jesus could help him and he humbly asked for Jesus to look on him with mercy.

Zacchaeus couldn't see Jesus to begin with. Zacchaeus was on the outside of his community, too. By profession, Zacchaeus was a tax collector; in fact, he was the *chief* tax collector. Which meant that he worked on behalf of the empire to collect money - often unfair amounts of money - from average people to fund the emperor's programs and to line his own pockets. So it's possible that the reason Zacchaeus couldn't see Jesus was just because he was short. But it might also have been that the crowds refused to allow this tax collector to the front for a better look. Maybe they were happy to block his view and stand in his way, which forced him to hike up his robes and climb a tree to get a glimpse of Jesus.

Like these men, we cannot always see things clearly in our own lives or when it comes to our faith. Our eyes and minds sometimes fool us into thinking that we are much admired, when people are actually just being polite to us. Or, our eyes tell us we are disliked and on the outside of the crowd, when it is only our own lack of confidence and keeping to ourselves that seems to be putting us there. We almost never see the clear and full picture of events happening around us. We often cannot fully grasp the suffering of neighbors who are having trouble paying bills and buying food. Or we cannot imagine that people with wealth experience any real troubles in their lives. We are inundated with news of the closure of government programs and offices. Some of us may imagine the impacts those decisions have on everyday people, but it's hard to truly see and understand the full results. And every day, we miss opportunities to see Christ at work right in all those situations.

Though the men in the story couldn't see the full picture, *they both wanted to*. I think we want to see, too. It was Jesus' seeing of them that allowed them to start seeing more clearly. Jesus acknowledged and noticed the blind man. Jesus gave him the dignity of being asked what he actually needed and wanted. And in being able to see, he would be able to rejoin his community as a full participant once again. Jesus saw Zacchaeus, too. As a son of Abraham and child of God, yes. But Jesus also saw him as someone who could give, not just take. Suddenly Zacchaeus needed to be the host to Jesus: he needed to offer a welcome, to be generous, to share. By seeing him in a new light, Jesus opened the way for Zacchaeus to right the relationships he'd broken and injustices he had done. The offering of generous hospitality always has the potential to change us for the better; to invite us to share even more. Zacchaeus seemed ready to try out a life of generosity, instead of a life of taking unfairly. Did he make good on that promise? We don't know. But we know that he started to see what was possible.

From Jesus, each man received their own kind of salvation. Both of them walked away seeing something new and holy in themselves and their community. Perhaps they saw with their eyes, but especially with their hearts and minds. They each saw a new way to live; they glimpsed a different way of inhabiting the world. They could envision a fresh way of being a true part of their community.

In our worldwide community, it feels difficult to see anything but a lot of pain right now. The world we are living in is really hurting. Truths we have taken for granted for a long time are changing or being taken away. The path ahead does not seem to be marked with unity or equity or righteousness in the way the Bible describes. It's easy for us to look out and see only that. And to be absolutely paralyzed and dumbfounded by it.

God's invitation is to keep our eyes open. To pay attention to the suffering of others, not to block it out. To see it, even though it's hard to take in, just as God is seeing it all, too. And then also to see that there is another truth, there is another way. Because Jesus already sees each of us, we are invited to dwell in God's reality; God's story. We are invited to abide in God's love and to mend our own lives, as Zacchaeus committed to doing.

The table and the Lord's Supper help us to see and feel that Kingdom reality; the truth of God's realm; God's way of doing things. At the table we can see, because we are fed here; not alone, but together. We see ourselves as part of this bigger body of people. We remember that this community has power for good. We have a voice that we can use to name what is hurting and unjust and we can speak God's words of salvation. At the table, we see that people can receive something small and all have what they need. We see that people who look different and who disagree can break bread together. We see that love is strong enough to draw us together, much stronger than death or death-dealing ways. The table, the bread, the cup, the community, the serving, the receiving, the simplicity, the gratitude, all of that helps us to really see what God intends, what God is doing, what God wills for the world. When we can see it, there's the chance to live it.

In the East Jerusalem district called Silwan, the community has installed a series of public art installations called *I Witness Silwan*. Silwan is a predominantly Palestinian neighborhood. There has been a longstanding effort on the part of Israel to evict the thousands of Palestinians who live there. The murals of *I Witness Silwan* are giant pairs of eyes painted on whole sides of the concrete houses. They look directly at the Old City and the religious tourist sites there, which continue to expand. The huge pairs of eyes depict real people: among them Palestinian farmers, Sigmund Freud, George Floyd, and Rachel Corrie, an American who was killed when she tried to protect a Palestinian home from being destroyed in 2003. Jawad Siyam directs the Creative Arts center that heads up the mural project. He says, "The staring eyes say to people that we see them and they should see us