

SEE the world and see us as we each were created. Which is to say, made to be loved. And this compassionate activity of God to dismantle the troubles and the sufferings of this world carries on. It even can carry on through us.

So, friends of compassion, may you see the compassion of Christ alive in the world. May you see the love of God dismantling burdens of judgement. And when you feel your self seen, may you turn back with faith and gratitude. May it be so, today and always, Amen.



First Presbyterian Church
of Royal Oak

October 12, 2025
18th Sunday after Pentecost
“*The Compassion of Seeing*”
Rev. Matthew Nickel
Scripture: Luke 17:11-19

In the movie *Good Will Hunting*, Matt Damon plays the role of the main character, Will, a 20-year-old who most people describe in a lot of ways. And Good is not often one of them.

Early in the movie, he and his other friends get into a fight that lands him in court and ultimately assigned to court ordered therapy because of a rap sheet that includes assault, resisting arrest, assaulting an officer, theft, among other charges.

The scenes that follow are a sequence of brief and sometimes comical interactions with therapists. Granted, these are made for a good movie rather than effective therapy. A man trying to help and mentor Will is carting him around to the finest therapists in Boston with good intentions.

The first therapist gets straight to work and hypnotizes Will. Well tells stories that seem real until he breaks into song singing: *Sky rockets in flight, afternoon delight*. Therapy ends with Will mocking a clearly excellent therapist who says, with a shaming tone: *I have better things to do than meet with kids like this*.

Another therapist meets him in an ivy league office surrounded by university Gothic arches. The therapist get right to the point. He tells Will that his shenanigans are getting in the way of his potential. And directs him to stop his tom foolery and ballyhoo. Let just say that lands great with a 20-something trying to enjoy life at the therapist storms out of the office and says he has no time for this.

Then Will meets Sean McGuire, played by Robin Williams.

In an unkempt office of a small community college showing all the signs of a life of a professor where little went his way. The two of them sit in silence a lot. Will is defensive, angry, and hurt. He tries to get under the therapist's skin. Sean's skin. And he does. But Sean sees Will's pain and empathizes. He holds Will's anger with him and he does not judge. He recognizes Will's defensiveness and waits for him to be ready. Slowly building trust, until

1 <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/ordinary-28-3/commentary-on-luke-1711-19>

2 This phrase is from *Healing What's Within* by Chuck DeGroat.

through their conversations: Until Will can see himself different than he has in the past—Until Will can love the parts of himself that others judge and shame. And this changes Will in significant and dramatic ways. *If you want to know how, you go watch the movie.* What is important is that by being seen, he can see himself with love. And he is freed to live the life he has kept himself from living.

The story of Jesus healing the ten men is a story of being seen. Seen without judgement and with compassion. Throughout Galilee, stories of Jesus teaching and healing spread. It would be no surprise that these stories spread to this village. For people in this village though, these ten are outsiders. They are avoided, unseen, disconnected, shamed, and shunned. These are people who are unlovable because of their disease. Put simply, in modern language, they have been permanently ghosted. These ten are as good as dead in their community.

When Jesus walks into town they call out, have mercy on us. And Jesus turns to them and sees them. When the people of their village would not see them, or even their neighbors, friends, or even families, Jesus looked toward them and identifies them beyond their disease. He sees them with grace and compassion and care. Go Jesus says, go and show yourselves to the priests. And while the ten walked on they were healed.

There is a story of the 16th century reformer Martin Luther. When someone asked him to describe the true nature of worship, he answers: the tenth leper looking back.¹

The tenth leper, having been seen by Jesus, see himself healed. Hopefully all the others can too, but the tenth shows his unburdening. He can now look toward himself and see his true self. He turns back to Jesus who already saw who he was beyond the disease. And the tenth man turning to Jesus, the Bible says, he recognizes him. The tenth man recognizes who Jesus is and the grace he makes.

When he turns back to thank Jesus, the Bible says he gave *eucharisto*. As in, he did what we do when we gather together for communion. When we celebrate the eucharist, we give *eucharisto*, we see God with gratitude for the grace and compassion that is given. And in this case, the grace of being seeing as God's very own: Beyond disease, stigma, judgement, as one truly loved by God. We are seen, we are known, we are loved.²

The tenth man can see himself without the judgement or shame.

A person of faith trusts that God loves them, and as Psychologist Jim Hollis puts it, they *can bestow love on the unlovable parts of themselves*. The ten made whole can now turn toward themselves with compassion. The tenth man witnesses to this reality.

In my practice as a mental health therapist, I use a model of therapy called Internal Family Systems. There is a saying in this model that is offered to people who experience trauma, addiction, and other kinds of distress that leads to shame and guilt: *There is nothing wrong with you. Something happened to you.*

In this way of thinking, we recognize that parts of ourselves function to protect the wounds we've experienced throughout our lives, and as a result cause distress. Distort our thinking to see that something might be wrong when it is otherwise. There is good intention behind this protection, but it creates difficulty for ourselves and often others.

We try to hide those parts because we and/or others have defined them as *bad or unwelcome*.

Through the hard work of seeing our inner lives, especially these wounded parts of us, with clarity and compassion—we can welcome wholeness and heal what is within. And in doing so, we can heal what is within us and with others as well.

Bessel Van der Kolk is a Psychiatrist and trauma researcher who says: "Trauma is when we are not seen and not known."

The ten men were not seen and not known. The tenth leper, Now, having been seen by Jesus, sees that he is healed. He can now look toward himself without the disease. And do so with compassion and without judgment or his abandonment.

The part of him that was diseased, and as a result judged, is still there. But he holds it in a new way now. The tenth man will always carry that part of him. It is important but now it is healed and he is released from that shame to live his life. It becomes a welcome part that is a source of strength and compassion, and hopefully a motivation to bring wholeness to himself and others.

This can remind us all that the power of seeing ourselves and others with love, compassion, and care can disrupt the pain and corruption that judgement, fear, and shame can make.

For so long, Matt Damon's character Will was not seen or known. And he cannot erase the actions he made in his past to manage and heal his own pain, sadness, and alienation.

In the movie, when his connection to Sean helps him see himself with compassion over a long period of healing, those painful and judged parts release the burdens they carry and Will can see his own self with that compassion too.

Jesus brings wholeness and healing to places of shame and judgement. The work of Christ in the world is not limited to these ten. God continues to