

What You See is What is What You Get

Dr. Stephen D. McConnell



Acts 3:1-10

I was in a room I wasn't supposed to be in. It was my first visit to Israel some 20 years ago and we were touring the Israel Museum in Jerusalem and our mission there was to view pieces of the Dead Sea Scrolls and artifacts from the time of Jesus. But I had fallen behind (story of my life) and took a wrong turn and ended up in a room that housed a collection of French Impressionist paintings. Now I am nowhere close to being an art aficionado, or an art student, so in a very real sense not only was I in the room I wasn't supposed to be in – I wasn't even quite sure what I was looking at. All I knew was that my eyes had fallen upon a painting that had arrested me. It was a painting that I couldn't stop looking at. I'm not sure how to explain it, but maybe you've had the same kind of experience – that your eye catches something – a piece of art, a piece of nature, a vista, a landscape – and it so captures you that you don't want to stop looking.

This painting that stopped me dead in my tracks in the wrong room was painted by a French Impressionist named Camille Pissarro. Many of you know that name – but at the time I didn't know the name and not even much about Impressionism. Some, but not much. The painting's name is *Sunset at Eragny*. It is a view across some fields outside of Eragny in France and it shows the sun low in the sky but high enough that it still glows in brilliant yellow and the way Pissarro paints this sun it almost leaps off the canvas. It was this sun that captured me, I didn't want to turn my gaze.

Now when I went back to the U.S., as my family will attest, I became a Camille Pissarro junkie. I wanted to know everything there was to know about this painter and I wanted to take in every one of his paintings. Now as these things go, of course, there is never anything quite like your first true love (that's why I married mine)

– and there is nothing like this painting for me. And there was no one quite like Camille Pissarro. Because what I learned, and what many of you know already, is the Camille Pissarro is widely known as the grandfather pioneer of the Impressionist movement. Camille Pissarro had something inside of him – that was able to see the world... and convey it, express it, magnify it – in a way that no one had ever quite done. Seeing in front of him this landscape -- what he saw was tiny points of light that translated into tiny points of color that translated into tiny strokes of color from his brush to the canvas. Pissarro was one of the earliest persons to see the world this way. Monet, Renoir, Manet, Degas – all of the impressionist masters – household names to most, owed their careers and reputations to the one who for all intents and purposes saw the world like very few had ever seen the world. All because there was something inside of him that helped him to see what most couldn't see. Tiny points of light, tiny points of color, that turned into tiny strokes of color from his brush to his canvas. In 1865, very few people in the world saw the world that way.

History, of course, is full of men and women who had something inside them that allowed them to see what most couldn't see.

Dare I suggest that most of us in this sanctuary are carrying with them an iPhone or something of the sort - smartphone. Who would have imagined such a device 20 years ago? Something that could inform and influence your life almost every moment of every day. But there was something inside of Steve Jobs that helped him to see what most couldn't see.

Michelangelo stared at a piece of marble and saw what most couldn't see – he saw the *Pieta* – he saw the figure of Mary, the mother of Jesus holding across her lap her son, the crucified and lifeless Jesus.

Robert Frost looked into a wood and saw two roads diverge – and saw something no one else could see – the image of a poem that would find its way into just about every high school English text book. Two roads diverged in a wood – and I, I took the one less traveled by and that has made all the difference.

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inside of them that allowed them to see what most couldn't see.

And so might we wonder if the same kind of thing is happening in this early story about the early church. Days, maybe weeks, after the ascension of Jesus his apostles remember to remain in Jerusalem to wait for the Holy Spirit. And sure enough the Holy Spirit comes on Pentecost and now Peter is worshipping with John in the temple. And upon exiting the temple Peter sees something that most are unable to see. Inside him is the Holy Spirit, inside him are three years of the ministry of Jesus, inside him are the deep and unforgettable moments of Jesus' ministry of care and compassion – and now all of a sudden Peter is able to see what most are unable to see – Peter sees a man. He sees a lame man.

We can imagine, can't we, that this is an invisible man to most? Despite the attempt of the lame man's friends to put him in a place where he could be seen by susceptible

them". He was a segment of the population they didn't appreciate. But evidently not until Peter arrives does anyone see him as a man in need of them.

But you see this Peter who is advancing on this lame man is a man who has something inside of him, and this something inside of him causes him to see the world differently. He sees something, he sees someone no one else can see. Because, you see, Peter is now an artist. Peter is now an instrument of some greater force, some greater vision. Peter, captured by the Holy Spirit now sees himself as an instrument of new creation. An instrument of God's healing power. Peter has taken on a new job description. And what sets Peter and John apart for all those who are coming to and fro in and out of the temple is that these two, followers of Jesus, stop. They stop. They see and they stop. Kind of like an artist who stops and sets down the canvas and begins to paint. Peter sees something in the lame man that causes him to stop. And by his stopping something creative, or shall

“...we are here because in some way we believe we have been claimed by the Holy Spirit. And that gives us the power to see the world a different way – and to see the world as a canvas of individual brush strokes.”

Temple worshippers – this man is likely not being seen. He is not being seen by anybody who could possibly see him as a man in need of them. Many saw him maybe as a pitiful man. Many saw him perhaps as a lazy man. Many saw him as a man in the way. Who knows, maybe there were some who could not see the man because to them he wasn't even a man, he was a category – he was “one of

we say recreative is going to take place. Something from within these two apostles says that this is a person who can be healed, who can be changed, who can be given another chance. And because Peter has been claimed by the One who has the power to heal – Peter knows that healing will take place here. That in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth this man will find healing. And Peter

takes the man by the right hand and raises him up.

He raised him up.

You see, whether you stop is a matter of what you see. And what you see in front of you is a matter of what you see inside you. What you see is yourself.

Jesus told the story of the Good Samaritan – a story we could all likely tell from memory. A man beaten on the side of the road and as the story goes three men happen to pass down the road. Two of the men – religious professionals – do not take the time to stop. They pass by on the other side of the road. There was either something inside of them or not inside of them that kept them from stopping. Because whether you stop is a matter of what you see and what you see in front of you is a matter of what you see inside of you. They could not see that maybe in some way they were ambassadors of recreation. They could not see that in themselves.

Something though possesses the Samaritan – the least popular character in the story because of his ethnic identity – something possesses the Samaritan to see it in himself to be an agent of healing. He doesn't appear to be a doctor or first aid officer – he's just a man who sees it in himself to be a person who might discover what he might do to bring help.

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So it is not long after this – perhaps the most important moment in the Bible – when Peter has a dream. And in the dream he sees all sorts of animals that Jews by virtue of their dietary laws were not permitted to eat. But in the vision Peter hears a voice that says, “What God has made clean you must not call profane” and so inside him Peter has this vision of unclean being made clean and as circumstances would have it – Peter is invited into the home of a Gentile – an unclean person in the eyes of a good Jew – and Peter sees something no one has ever seen before. Peter sees a man. A man. Not a profane man. Not an unclean man. Just a man. And now no one is beyond the reach of God's recreating grace.

It's an amazing mission that followers of Jesus receive – we are the healers, the recreators of what has once been determined unclean. God creates out of nothing and what God creates out of nothing God calls good – but to live in this world is to get banged up a bit, sullied by the sin of the world, wounded by our own brokenness – stained by life – and it is the followers of Jesus who get to be the ones who are the recreators of that which has once been determined unclean.

Twenty years ago when reading the newspaper an obituary popped off the page at me. No, it wasn't mine. It was one Robert Mallary – junk artist. Robert Mallary pioneer of junk art. What in heaven's name? Robert Mallary had made it his artistic career to create art out of human junk. He made it his focus to collect the normal everyday junk that you and I wouldn't think twice about throwing into the garbage – and used it as the medium of his art. He sculpted new things out of unclean things. What he saw in front of him was a matter of what he saw inside him.

You know there is something in me that wonders if you and I don't sometimes suffer from a poor self-image. I wonder if sometimes we imagine that we don't have much to offer the world out there. That when we walk out these doors there is this big complex world with difficult issues and all kinds of categories of people – all sorts of folks who have needs --and that's why we have doctors and lawyers and professionals who take care of things. And if that is the view we have – that we are not the ones who are needed – then we will not be the ones who see and we will not be the ones who stop.

Tommy Lasorda, former manager of the Los Angeles Dodgers said, “Eighty percent of the people in your life don't care about your problems and the other twenty percent are glad you have them.”

I submit to you that's a really bad way of looking at things.

But something's made us different right? Something has made the Christ community different, right? Something – or someone has taken possession of the inside. We are claimed by the Holy Spirit. If we pay attention to it at all

– we are here because in some way we believe we have been claimed by the Holy Spirit. And that gives us the power to see the world a different way – and to see the world as a canvas of individual brush strokes. Each one just as important as the other. Because without each one the picture isn't the same. And we get to be the artists – that look at every piece of human creation and see it for what it is. The creation of God. Sometimes the broken creation of God...sometimes the creation of God that someone else might think of as junk – but we get to see each person, each stroke of the brush as the potential. The potential of recreation. The potential of healing. The potential of being made clean. The potential of being made new.

Babe Ruth, once the greatest homerun hitter of all time said that the greatest man in his life was not the man who paid him his salary – but the man who took him in when he was seven years old. An incorrigible little boy he was – he was sent to a school for wayward boys in Baltimore – St. Mary's Industrial School for Boys run by a Brother Matthias. And Brother Matthias looked into the soul of the young George Herman Ruth – and saw some material he could work with. And worked he did – teaching him to play baseball and to swing a bat. A recreation.

Do you see that about yourself? When you look inside do you see this follower of Jesus – this identity of being a reconciling, recreating and healing force in the world? Do you imagine one of the medic bands on your arm, a red cross on your chest when you walk into this world? Do you have pallet in hand – such that you might take the man on the pallet and with your pallet seek to subcreate? Reimagine, help, heal – whatever it might be – at least to stop and see the tiny point of light. It's what makes us a little different – not better for God's sake – but a little bit different?

Because Lord knows what this world needs is a little bit of different, right?



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Church of the Palms

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