

**Rev. Paul Nesbit**  
**Sermon October 9, 2022**  
**First Congregational Church of Westfield**

Visions

Have you ever played the game "Telephone" or "Operator?" If you haven't played, the originator or "Operator" whispers a phrase to someone who then passes it down the line. The last person says it aloud to see if the original phrase was passed through correctly. More often than not, there is some variation as someone hears it incorrectly, wasn't paying attention, or some combination of the two. This could help explain what the original hearers went through when Jesus told them that the Samaritan was the only one who went back and thanked Jesus when he was healed. Surely this is NOT what could have happened.

Welcome back to the Gospel of Luke 10:1. We have been here before, haven't we? Let's go back to our Gospel lesson this morning. What words stand out for you? You should pay attention to Samaria, Galilee, Samaritan, healed, priest as well as the phrase "Your faith has made you well."

We look at the region between Samaria and Galilee because people did not dally there. The area was loaded with bandits and robbers. These miscreants were pretty common on the back roads or in the less inhabited areas. Also, the region of Samaria should stand out for you. Who remembers why your ears should perk every time you hear the word "Samaritan?" Samaritans were despised due to their decision to not worship in the Temple in Jerusalem. They were basically shunned and regarded as

“bad.” If they had been in Jerusalem silent movies, the Samaritans would have been booed and hissed.

Here again we find Jesus using the bad Samaritan as the only person who had done the “right thing.” Remember the parable of the Good Samaritan as the only one who would stop to help the man who had been robbed? However, the Samaritan had a little more figured out. Perhaps he is the one who came back to Jesus, not only healed of his affliction, but also healed in his heart. Healing needs to take place inside as well as outside. We need clean lives as well as clean skin. Many people worship and pray and generally reject the religious life, seeking only the gifts of God and not the person of Christ. This is why there is an inconsistency between talk and walk. How does this make him different?

The difference was the vision. The nine saw a healer, the immediate source of help for the problem. The Samaritan saw the answer to all his problems, heart and body. The nine saw a useful healer to remove the barrier to getting along with the old life. The Samaritan saw the end to his quest for healing inside, as well as outside.

In the next few weeks, we are going to take a look at our own vision for the next year in our own church. What does the future hold for us here at First Congregational Church? What are we willing to give to make this happen? It takes all of us in this vision to continue the work of spreading the Gospel message here in our church. We don't know what the future holds for us, but we have been given the tools, the brainpower and the ingenuity to figure it out.

Remember those nine in the Gospel who wanted to go back to their old way of life? Is that what we want here for our church? There are a couple of different ways of looking at it. Some folks who are here pine for the days of old when the church was filled or more filled than it is now. I firmly believe that this is how we are meant to be for this particular moment. We have to look at who we are, who we have, what we have. But that doesn't mean that we sit here and do nothing but dream of the good old days. We have to take action: we have to plan for what we can use this building and our resources. We may have to embrace new people, new ideas, and new things. On the other hand, we certainly don't give up. We continue our beautiful music program and the other things we have in place. We have to work together to invite others to be in our church community. We have to make sure that everyone is welcome here, even if it means that we are going to change and our make up may look different.

The nine sought the blessings of the priest. The Samaritan praised God and saw his blessing. In the end the Samaritan saw a greater vision, the immediate source of help for the world, the door to a new world. He saw a Savior. Vision makes all the difference in the world for the world. So, let's get the message right—don't be surprised by what God may be telling us and don't forget to offer God your praise. Let's get it right!