John and Peter were walking to the temple one day to pray and worship when they came across a beggar. Have you ever come across a beggar? If you live in the Seattle-Tacoma metropolitan area, of course you have. What reactions does that elicit in you? What does it make you feel? what does it make you think?

The beggar was being carried to the place called the Beautiful Gate, outside the temple. It’s ironic, because a beggar bothering people for alms is anything but beautiful. Nevertheless, this was his practice. He (and presumably others like him) chose this time and place to beg because that’s when people went to the temple to pray and to worship, and people in such a frame of mind may be inclined to be more generous, or at least, more pitying.

Something else I find ironic about this is that I wonder if the beggar wouldn’t have been allowed into the place in front of which he was begging, the place where all of his patrons were going. He had been lame from birth; which might have been due to a physical deformity that might have made him ritually unclean. Even if I’m wrong about that, I can’t help but wonder if, in his poverty, he would have been unclean in other ways, unable to follow the various regulations about eating kosher or personal hygiene or the like.

Because of this, he must remain outside the temple. Outside the temple, outside of people’s sight and out of their minds. Outside the temple, sitting on his mat, he could be safely ignored except for the few moments when people would walk past and perhaps toss him a few coins. He is outside, they are inside.

That is, until Peter and John show up. Unlike everyone else, when the beggar asks for change they don’t hand him some money and walk past. They stop. St. Luke says that Peter looked at the man intently, told him, “look at us.” He made eye contact. Have you ever done that? Made eye contact with someone holding one of those cardboard signs? Did you talk to them? What did you say?

I keep calling him “the beggar,” but that’s not what he is. He is not a “beggar,” he is a man who is begging. Peter and John see this. They don’t write him off as an obstacle to be avoided or an obligation to fulfill, they see him as a person. Everybody else looks at the man and sees him as “other,” as “not like me,” as “not my problem.”

While everyone else was hurrying to get inside to do the important work of praying and worshiping, Peter and John stopped outside. They talked to him. He asked them for money, but they didn’t give him any. “I have no silver or gold,” Peter tells him, “but what I have, I give you; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up and walk.” And he did. He got up, and then he started walking, and then he started leaping, and then he followed Peter and John right into the temple.

That is what gets everyone’s attention. That’s what astonishes them: that this *outsider* has come *inside*. And when he sees that astonishment, that’s when Peter speaks. He says, “What is the big deal? Why are you gawking at us? You think *we* made him walk, waved our magic wands and, ‘abra cadabra’ gave him the use of his legs?” That kind of power, he says, doesn’t belong to him and John, but to Jesus.

What Peter explains to everyone is that there are two kinds of power in the world. The first kind, the kind we all know and use every day, is the power to make people “other,” the power to create outsiders. That’s the kind of power that these good, church-going folk used against Jesus. They and their rulers determined that Jesus was a problem, an enemy, and so they did what we typically do to enemies. We put them outside: outside our homes, outside our communities, outside our temples and synagogues and churches. We lock them away in prisons and institutions, whatever it takes to separate them from us. In Jesus’ case, they did the most separating thing they could: they put him to death by hanging him on a tree for all to see. The message is clear: don’t be like this guy. This is what happens to outsiders.

But Jesus’ power is different. Jesus doesn’t make *outsiders*, he makes *insiders*. He brings people in. He did that his whole life: he ate with sinners and tax collectors, he called fishermen and women to be his disciples, he made room for everyone at God’s table and in God’s house. That’s what made him a threat, an enemy. That’s why he was killed. But, even after being killed, he *still reached out and brought people in*. Even after being rejected by his own people, abandoned by his friends, denied by Peter, he still reached out—even across the boundary between life and death—and brought them all back in.

Our power—the power to make outsiders—is the power to kill. Jesus’ power, the power to make insiders—is the power to bring life. “Y’all used your power against Jesus,” Peter says, “but even after that, Jesus still has the power to make this man walk, to give him his life back.”

Then Peter works another miracle. He does the very same thing a second time: he brings the outsiders in; he brings life where there was death. He talks to these people, these folks who walk past beggars and crucify Messiahs, and says, “Friends, I know you and your rulers acted in ignorance. I’m neither judging nor condemning you. I’m here to let you know that what Jesus just did for this man is exactly what Jesus is waiting to do for you: to take away what keeps you from God and give you your lives back.” And, St. Luke says, 5000 people accepted that invitation that day.

Maybe what’s most remarkable is that these are Peter’s enemies. They are the ones who shouted “Crucify” in the crowds and got his friend and teacher executed. Enemies are dangerous because they are different. They have different values from us, different goals. That difference makes them dangerous. It’s why we put them “outside” of us, make them “them,” make them “other.”

But like that man who used to beg on the street, Peter doesn’t look at them and see “others.” He looks at them and sees fellow Israelites, friends. In Greek, he calls them, “brothers,” siblings. He looks at them and sees himself. He sees how he, too, denied and abandoned Jesus. The harm done by these people in the temple was real; but it was no less real than the harm Peter himself had done. By loving them—recognizing his kinship with them—rather than hating and “othering” them, Peter is able to face the evil in himself as well as the evil in these others, and to grow into a better disciple, a better apostle, and a better person.

When we look at people and see our differences, we feel fear, hate, anger. When we make people “other,” it’s easy for us to point the finger, to be disgusted or confounded by their terrible beliefs or behaviors or actions. It’s why it’s so easy to cancel people or ostracize them for being racists, for example, but so hard to face the racist attitudes or beliefs or actions we ourselves hold or commit, even in ignorance. When look at people and see our similarity, we have empathy, love, compassion for them. Peter looks at his enemies and sees people like him. He sees himself. And that allows him to speak to them, not in anger or condemnation or threat, but in love, in genuine care for their wellbeing.

When we “other” people, we keep them as beggars and ourselves as the kind of people who walk past beggars. We separate ourselves, placing a great, uncrossable chasm between us. But Jesus crosses the uncrossable chasm: he returns to life after being dead! The power to cross that chasm is love. When Peter and John first encounter the man who was begging, they had no money; but what they did have in abundance was the love of Jesus, who was God’s love incarnate. Jesus loved his disciples to the end, as St. John says; and elsewhere he writes that Jesus came “so that we might have life and have it abundantly.” Peter and John gave what they had first been given in abundance: the love of Christ, which is life itself. Is it any wonder that the man could walk?

This is the miracle, my friends: that we should be called children of God, and that is what we are: people born not of blood or the will of the flesh or the will of a man, but of God; people put to death and reborn from the same love of God from which the world itself was created and given life. See what love the Father has given us! This love not only makes the lame walk, it comes to us when we are blinded by fear and anger and hatred to help us see that, just as in this story, enemies and friends are often one in the same; to see that “us” and “them” are more alike than we are different.

Here’s something to try: think of one person who you consider an enemy. Go on their Facebook page and look through their photos. See if you have any mutual friends. Look at the messages left for them on their birthday. You know what makes them different from you, but what makes you the same?