



Looking But Not Seeing

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My grandmother, now long deceased, was dear to me. We'd play canasta – for money, of course – from morning to night until my grandfather would complain that he wasn't being fed on time. As savvy as she was at card games, my grandmother occasionally got into scrapes from her lack of attention.

A frugal woman, she was delighted one day to find tuna on sale at the grocery store for ten cents per can. She bought ten cans at such a bargain rate. My grandfather complained, however, that his sandwich tasted terrible. "Well, I don't know why it would taste any different," my grandmother protested. Together they looked at the nine remaining cans in the kitchen cupboard. "Cat tuna!" exclaimed my grandfather. "You fed me cat food!" Flustered by her mistake, my grandmother declared her good intentions and questioned how she could have possibly known that it wasn't regular tuna. My grandfather was quick in his retort, "There's a picture of a cat on the can! Maybe that should have tipped you off."

The importance of seeing – truly seeing – was the topic for two presbytery and synod gatherings this past week. At our Synod executive forum, Elona Street-Stewart (our Synod Executive) read a story of a young pastoral intern whose close relative suffered a stroke. The intern sought out a congregational leader, Ed, to arrange time away. He found Ed at his construction site, framing an addition. As soon as Ed saw his pastor, he put down his hammer, laid aside his toolbelt, and focused on his pastor's request. From Ed, the intern learned the importance of setting down our hammers and truly seeing the other.

That message carried forward to the national mid-council leaders gathering this past weekend. Our presenter, Dr. Gregory Ellison spoke of what it means to be "cut dead," 19th century slang for being intentionally disregarded or snubbed. When we fail to see the people in our midst, we make them invisible and unimportant – we cut them dead. "Far too often," Ellison writes in his book *Fear+Less Dialogues*, "'in the traffic of our daily round' we render others invisible. We step over homeless persons, as if they are of no account. We talk on cellphones in checkout lines, giving little notice to the grocer bagging our food. We even discount hypervisible politicians, pastors, and professional athletes by creating public personas that give them little room to express the fullness of their personalities. The unacknowledged are all around us, and if we are fully truth with ourselves, we can each recall a fated moment when we felt unseen." Based on his research in working with groups and particularly with people of color, he has found, "To be unseen is to feel Anger, Rage, Hopeless, Insecure, Alone."

Ellison urges us to truly see those who are around us...to set down our hammers, as it were, and to look and listen deeply. The ministry is simple, but it has a profound impact on those who might otherwise be marginalized by every contact they have with people. I challenge you to try this with me. Let me know what happens!