Nicola Poussin, *Saints Peter and John Healing the Lame Man* (1655)

**Note:** After downloading the image, consider whether you will project a digital version or print quality copies.

**Introduction:** Nicolas Poussin (1594–1665) was a French painter who spent most of his working life in Rome, Italy, then the leading European art center. Most of his paintings were large-scale religious, historical, or mythological subjects and were highly favored by wealthy arts patrons and high-placed Catholic clergy.

**Content:** Invite participants to look carefully at the image.

**Observation questions:**

What do you see going on in the image? What jumps out at you?

**Context:**

Poussin’s painting is based on an episode from the Bible in the Acts of the Apostles, which outlines the history of the early Christian church. Peter (in the blue and gold robe) and John (in the red and green robe) were two of the most prominent followers of Jesus who witnessed many of his miracles. The painting is based upon the following text from Acts 3: 1–8 (NAS):

Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the ninth hour, the hour of prayer. And a certain man who had been lame from his mother’s womb was being carried along, whom they used to set down every day at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, in order to beg alms of those who were entering the temple. And when he saw Peter and John about to go into the temple, he began asking to receive alms. And Peter, along with John, fixed his gaze upon him and said, “Look at us!” And he began to give them his attention, expecting to receive something from them. But Peter said, “I do not possess silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you: In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene – walk!” And seizing him by the right hand, he raised him up; and immediately his feet and his ankles were strengthened. And with a leap, he stood upright and began to walk; and he entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God.

**Interpretation questions:**

With this additional context, let’s turn back to the image. What more do you notice? What more jumps out at you?

Look for details that the artist has drawn from the biblical text. What moment in the story did the artist select as the moment to depict? How might this moment be significant?

The figures in the foreground demonstrate the kind of charity the lame man seeks. What does this kind of charity offer to the one asking for help, and to the one giving help?

Why do you think it was important to Peter and John not to participate in the kind of charity the lame man originally sought? What did Peter and John seek to offer him instead?

What were the results of Peter and John’s interaction with the lame man?

**Implication questions:**

What message about service does the image hold for you? How does the image help you think about the service experiences you’ve had or about the concept of service?