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First Presbyterian Church of Greenville, MS

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Title: *Did You Look?*

Texts: Psalm 131; Matthew 6:19-34

O LORD, my heart is not lifted up,  
my eyes are not raised too high;  
I do not occupy myself with things  
too great and too marvelous for me.  
But I have calmed and quieted my soul,  
like a weaned child with its mother;  
my soul is like the weaned child that is with me.

O Israel, hope in the LORD  
from this time on and for evermore.

- Psalm 131

‘Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

‘The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light; but if your eye is unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!

‘No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.

‘Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? Therefore do not worry, saying, “What will we eat?” or “What will we drink?” or “What will we wear?” For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

‘So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today’s trouble is enough for today.

- Matthew 6:19-34

Growing up I worked in a store owned by my mother. It was called *Gatsby’s, Inc.* named after that great book by F. Scott Fitzgerald – *The Great Gatsby*. Working in that store was one of the highlights of my childhood. When I was in middle school and high school, *Gatsby’s* was located on the old downtown square. *Gatsby’s* sold imported foods, teas, gourmet whole bean coffee, gift baskets. My dad helped deliver gift baskets to the hospital and around town while he was out on pastoral care visitations... and I helped run the small coffee shop that was located in the back of the store.

We had a number of college students that worked at Gatsby's over the years. There were a quirky cast of characters that I worked with behind the desk.

It was funny... sometimes, not-so-funny – someone would misplace something that you desperately needed: a calculator, the receipt book, the register key, whatever... Inevitably someone would approach the store manager, Jeff. “I can't find the register key...” Then, his patented line: “Well – did you look?”

The response was either frustration or laughter “Of course *I looked*, but I can't seem to find it.” It seemed to me that there were times someone either hadn't looked very hard... or they were simply not going about the right way in looking for it... other times a person just needed a fresh pair of eyes...”

Jesus teaches us to be mindful of our senses. We experience God – in part – through our senses. We look for the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives and in the world... We listen for God's voice speaking to us through God's word... and through God's people. Our senses are critical tools for us to experience the Living God.

In Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, Jesus never asks where we are in the curriculum. He doesn't say: “Turn in your lesson to page such and such...” Instead, he observes a teachable moment where the world, the natural environment around them, has already laid out the curriculum. His lesson plan consists of multicolored wildflowers and beautiful red poppies protruding from the landscape in a stunning display. It was a sermon that could've only been preached in that very moment... in the spring season... when the day broke out in such beautiful weather. He walks among the grass and looks down, he sees flowers: *they stand out*... and he uses them as an object lesson that will transform the people of God, if they look... and listen.

In verse 21, Jesus says: “The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light; but if your eye is unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness.”

It is true. Our actions are deeply rooted in what we see with our eyes... what we choose to see... and what we choose not to see. A “healthy eye” sees the world as it is... the good, the bad and the ugly. A “healthy eye” takes the time to see, to really look... deeply... at the world in which we live.

Whether we can see God in the world depends on us, on our state of being. During Jesus' day, many who looked directly into the eyes of Jesus were not capable of seeing them.<sup>1</sup>

In the parable of the Good Samaritan we meet a man who was attacked by robbers. He was stripped of his clothes. He was beat, practically half dead. A priest and a Levite, who should have known better, *saw* the man, but they passed by on the other side. The text says that the priest and Levite saw the man on the road half dead, but I wonder if they really looked... deeply... at the man... and then made an honest-to-goodness judgment call on what to do. Perhaps there is a difference between seeing... and looking deeply... One very important lesson that comes from this famous sermon of Jesus' is that we are called to look deeply... dwell in the present moment. Be mindful of the movement of God... and you will receive blessing from God.

Why did the priest and the Levite neglect the man? Perhaps they were too busy. It seems as though today that we are in danger of becoming so busy that there is simply no time to look deeply. Often I ask the question: "How are you doing?" and the most common answer of good Christian people is: "BUSY" with a tone of mild exasperation.

The problem with this is: If we do not take the time to look deeply... into our world... and our lives... if we do not look deeply in the eyes of Jesus, when we finally arrive to the sanctuary on the Lord's Day, we will be incapable of seeing him. We may go out into the world during the week unable recognize the movement of the Holy Spirit. We may not realize it for a while. But we all know how life catches up with us... and we have to learn some lessons hard.

There is an ancient proverb that says: "The [Father's] kingdom is like a woman who was carrying a [jar] full of meal. While she was walking along [a] distant road, the handle of the jar broke and the meal spilled behind her [along] the road. She didn't know it; she hadn't noticed a problem. When she reached her house, she put the jar down and discovered that it was empty."<sup>2</sup>

We are in danger of being like that woman carrying a jar with a treasure that God has entrusted to us. A problem comes along: the handle of the jar breaks... and we lose our treasure, our special gift, our sustenance, that God has entrusted to us. The woman did not even know that this happened; she noticed no problem whatsoever. Eventually, she realized that her jar was empty...

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<sup>1</sup> Thich Naht Hanh. *Living Buddha, Living Christ*. (p. 52)

<sup>2</sup> *The Gospel of Thomas*, Saying #97.

I can't help but ask the woman: "How did that happen? *Did you look?*" "Sure I looked... or, at least, I thought I did" she might've said... "I had the jar with me all along. I was holding onto the handle with my own two hands. But then I came home... and I knew something was wrong. The jar was empty."

Jesus says: "The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light; but if your eye is unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness."

It was when I worked at Gatsby's that I realized that I was colorblind, the mildest form mind you, but still colorblind. So, don't let me fly any airplanes. I realized this when my Mom was making up a gift basket and she said: "Jonas, hand me some teal tissue paper. I looked up at the rack of tissue paper with about 8 shades of every color and I brought back what I thought was teal at my very amused mother. "No, that's not teal, Jonas. Not even close! I think you might be colorblind." It was humbling, but also very helpful to know that I see one color... and someone else sees another. Perception is very important; perception is a person's reality.

Spiritually speaking – we are all colorblind. We can't help but see the world through our own worldview, our culture, our slant – whatever it may be – and anything contrary to our view, I think it is human nature: we want to shield our eyes, pretend not to see it.

Have you ever noticed that when someone says something we hadn't thought of... something that changes our perspective... what do we say? But "You know... I haven't *looked* at it that way before."

Sometimes it's not just an idea we are not seeing. Sometimes it is people we fail to see.

In Jesus' ministry, Jesus looked deeply at the word; he looked deeply into people... and community. Jesus knew how to look beneath the veneer to see the real person. He saw something in Peter and Zacchaeus and Matthew; he saw something in the woman at the well that no one else saw.

I wonder: In our day to day lives, what are we not seeing?

(And) Who are we not seeing?

God calls us to see the world as it is, not as we want to see it.

We cannot achieve this by keeping ourselves busy...

Like the Psalmist, we need to pray:

“I have calmed and quieted my soul,  
like a weaned child with its mother;  
my soul is like the weaned child that is with me.”

God invites us to calm and quiet our soul, which then enables us to look deeply for God’s movement in our lives, and in the world.

The poet Thich Nhat Hanh says: “If we do not look deeply at Jesus’ life, we cannot see ‘the way, the truth, and the life.’ If we only satisfy ourselves with praising the name of Jesus, it is not practicing the life of Jesus. We must practice looking deeply, dwelling in the present moment with Christ... living deeply, loving and acting with compassion if we wish to truly honor Jesus. The way is Jesus himself and not just some idea of him. Jesus’ teaching is not static; Jesus’ teaching is not mere words but the reality of life. When we understand and practice deeply the life and teachings of Jesus, we penetrate the door and enter the abode of the Living Christ, and life eternal presents itself to us.”<sup>3</sup>

*Did you look?*

*Are you looking... right now... for Christ in our world? Do you see the movement of the Holy Spirit?*

Let us pray.

*O God, our hearts are not lifted up,  
our eyes are not raised too high;  
We do not occupy myself with things  
too great and too marvelous.  
But we have calmed and quieted our souls,  
like a weaned child with its mother;  
our soul is like the weaned child...*

*O God, help us to look for your presence in our lives, and in the world... dwelling deeply in the present moment... May we place our hope in you from this time on and forevermore. Amen.*

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<sup>3</sup> Thich Nhat Hanh. *Living Buddha, Living Christ*, pp. 55-56.