

**October 6, 2019**  
**Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost**

**First Presbyterian Church**  
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## **THE OPTIC NERVE OF THE SOUL**

Series 2020 vision – Eyes of the heart Enlightened... Trust the uplook – not the outlook

(This passage is part of the Sermon on the Mount – the great teachings of Jesus)

Matthew 6:22-23

22: "The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is sound, your whole body will be full of light; 23: but if your eye is not sound, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!

John 12:44-46 44: (Jesus offers these words to his disciples six days before the Passover—the last supper—and Jesus directing his comments in the understanding that he is about to conclude his public ministry)

And Jesus cried out and said, "He who believes in me, believes not in me but in him who sent me. 45: And he who sees me sees him who sent me. 46: I have come as light into the world, that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness.

Prayer: May we be attentive to your wisdom and open to new understandings. Sharpen our insight and deepen our commitment. Give us eyes to see you, minds to know you, and hearts to follow you.

### **INTRODUCTION**

I've made a few more trips to the Ophthalmologist than usual. A routine eye exam caused him concern about my optic nerves. So, in between visits, I sought to school myself about the optic nerve. I came to marvel at the make-up of the human eye.

The human eye is a complex organ, a perfect and interrelated system of about 40 individual subsystems. The optic nerve connects to the back of the eye near the macula and transmits electrical impulses from the retina to the brain. The retina has approximately 137 million special cells that respond to light. These micro-switches process information and funnel it to the optic nerve.

There are approximately 1.1 million nerve cells in each optic nerve. The optic nerve acts like a cable connecting the eye with the brain, where images are sorted out and interpreted in less than a millisecond.

What struck me was, as we marvel at all our technological developments in fiber optics, one fiber optic cable can transmit several hundred megabits per second. The optic nerve transmits 100 billion megabits per second.

The eye is an amazing instrument. I heard about a woman who went to see her doctor. Looking very worried she said, "Doctor, when I woke up this morning, I looked at myself in the mirror and saw my hair all wiry and frazzled, my skin was all wrinkled and pasty, my eyes were bloodshot and bugging out, and I had this corpse-like look on my face! What's WRONG with me, Doctor!?" The doctor looks her over for a couple of minutes, and then said: "Well, I can tell you that there is nothing wrong with your eyesight."

For some of you there may be nothing wrong with your eyesight. But on the other hand, there are a great many who have serious problems with their vision.

In the course of delivering the Sermon on the Mount, after the Beatitudes, and just after Jesus taught the disciples to pray—we find a compilation of verses offering short, pithy, marvels of spiritual wisdom. Sandwiched here we hear Jesus speaking about our eyes and our eyesight—figuratively and spiritually.

The power of sight is one of God's greatest gifts and humanity's most precious faculties. Yet, the eyesight of humanity often lacks spiritual depth and perception. We take in a great deal, observe much, but do not always understand what we see.

Since our eyes play such a vital role in our lives, it's not surprising that Jesus used the symbol of sight to teach spiritual truths. He speaks of the eye as "the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is sound, your whole body will be full of light; but if your eye is not sound, your whole body will be full of darkness."

Jesus himself gives us an eye exam. He is concerned about the optic nerves of our souls. Throughout the Gospels there are records of how Jesus healed people who were blind. With his curative powers he was able to restore sight. He not only helped some people see better physically, but more importantly; he helped them to see spiritually—to be perceptive in a new way.

Jesus is a divine ophthalmologist who first enables us to see the light, then leads us to even finer points of vision. He treats our nearsightedness, our farsightedness, our color blindness, and other maladies that afflict us.

Michelangelo once took a rejected piece of marble and out of it carved one of his greatest masterpieces. When asked what made him do it, he said, "I saw a thing of beauty there, waiting to be born." He possessed the power of perceptivity—to see in the actual that which was potential.

John Burroughs once remarked: "One of the hardest lessons we have to learn in this life, and one that many persons never learn, is to see the divine, the celestial, and the pure, in the common, the near at hand ... to see that heaven lies about us here in the world." God who has given us our various capacities, expects us to use our gifts as good stewards. Seeing is a capacity which not only prevents us from bumping into buildings, it contributes to our whole

spiritual enlargement and enrichment. This spiritual sight, this redemptive recognition is key to the salvation of the soul.

We can view the vicissitudes of life or vocation either as enemies to be avoided or possibilities for new discovery and achievement. In new challenges we can see either crisis or opportunity. As the Poet put it, "Two men looked out from prison bars—the one saw mud, and the other saw stars." Change can be envisioned as a frightening departure from static security or emerging growth that summons forth from us new resources and fresh resiliency. It is not what life is or what life does, but the optic nerve of our soul that defines our vision, our viewpoint, our outlook, and whether we see light or darkness.

Jesus' message is that if you are using your spiritual faculties as you should, then your whole body will be full of light. On the other hand, if your spiritual vision is distorted, then your whole outlook will be full of darkness. And if the light that is in you is merely darkness, then how tragic it is and how great the darkness.

In Jesus Christ, the optic nerve of your soul can be adjusted. Spiritual sight can be restored. Distortions in spiritual consciousness can be refocused. An outlook that is pure and just and noble and right can be renewed. We have the choice between generous eyes or grudging eyes. Jesus Christ brings light to our outlook. Allow the insight he brings to become your corrective vision for the optic nerve of your soul.