

September 29, 2019
Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost

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TRUST THE UPLOOK ~ NOT THE OUTLOOK

Introduction to Text

Followers of Christ have suffered persecution throughout history. Beatings, imprisonment, loss of property, and martyrdom have been the fate of countless Christians. For those of us who aren't suffering in these ways, it's hard to imagine the temptations that persecution brings. Christians who live in peace and safety often compromise their faith even without threats. Hebrews was written to bolster the faith of those who faced persecution and struggle.

The Meaning of Faith

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. Indeed, by faith our ancestors received approval. By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible.

Prayer for illumination

Open our faith eyes, O God, for we have failed to see evidences of your living presence when they were right in front of us. Help us now to see again, to see through the lens of your word read and proclaimed.

INTRODUCTION

SIGHT

So far in this series we've looked at 2020 vision – seeking to have (Paul's words: "the eyes of our hearts enlightened") and today – trust the uplook not the outlook.

Through the gift of sight images are reflected, perceptions are relayed, focus is given to vision, ideas and revelations are conveyed.

EYES

Vision, of course, begins with our eyes...

Our eyes are the gates for much of the outside world. Through them into our inner beings we come to visualize loved ones and landscapes; mountains and media; books and bugs; rivers and roads; streams, sunsets, and star lit skies. Through them we come to see all the other things, both beautiful and ugly, that impact our existence.

Eyes flicker in seduction, roll in exasperation, stare vacantly in shock, become narrow in anger, wink in humor, twinkle in fun, dart in fear, sparkle in love, and close in sleep. (I caught you!)

Our eyes are among the most magnificent triumphs of God's creative power. They give us the privilege of living in a world of brilliant color. Silently, swiftly, and effortlessly they can follow any moving object we wish to watch.

Since our eyes play such a vital role in our lives, it comes as no surprise that the most common images used in Scripture have to do with the eye, vision, or sight. There are multiple references where the Psalmist, Jesus, and a host of Biblical writers help us to strip away the normal visual veils that obscure our sight and open our spiritual eyelids.

LIMITED SIGHT

An old Chinese proverb says: "One-third of what we see is in front of our eyes, but two-thirds is behind our eyes." Impaired vision does not always refer to eyesight. Our vision can be impaired by ambition, by worry or disaster, by prejudice or fear or greed. The great thinker and philosopher Helen Keller said, "The most pathetic person in the world is someone who has sight, but no vision."

It is ironic that religion has come to mean for many a set of blinders restricting vision rather than a way of viewing the whole range of life through the spectacle of God's grace. The gospel of Jesus Christ is not a set of blinders; it is a lens of greater vision.

Do you know what the oldest continuous society in existence is? It is "The Flat-Earth-Society," according to its hardy band of about 1,500 members scattered around the world. The group claims roots from the Zetetic Society, a Greek school of skeptics from ancient times. In spite of all the "eye-opening" modern evidence, the flat-earth people refuse to believe the world is round. Proving again that "There are none so blind as those who will not see."

The late comedian Bob Hope was also known for his great affection for golf. He was the MC at an event to present an award to Charles Boswell. Boswell was a noted University of Alabama athlete and outstanding blind golfer. His heroism during WWII is what left him blind. Boswell would have an assistant line up the club, but he swung it himself. He was really good. Hope got to the podium to make the presentation, but he couldn't resist a little comic relief and a whole lot of kidding. "Outstanding blind golfer, huh? I'd like to play you sometime." Boswell said, "Mr. Hope, I'd love to play you a round of golf." Hope said, "I don't think you understand. I only play for money." "Great. I like to have a little side bet going, too. It makes things more interesting." "What kind of handicap would I have to give you, Charlie?" "Mr. Hope, I'll tell you what, I'll play you even up." Hope was thrilled. "When can we play?" Boswell said, "Tonight at midnight."

Have you ever heard the term Presbyopia? It's a real word, not another Revised Weenink Version from the lexicon of Jeffrey speak. It's a handy word with an interesting sound that wordsmiths such as writers and preachers find highly useful. It literally means, old eyes. Sometimes described as tired eyes. Our crystalline lens lose their elasticity. They become hardened.

Presbyopia, as an impairment, does not always refer to eyesight. This kind of ailment can corrode our souls and deaden our lives. Trust the uplook – not the outlook. OK, the future is not as clearly defined and predictable as many of you would prefer – here at FPCP. Look to the future with optimism, hope, gratitude. Don't worry. Invest in the future with confidence. God is never early, never late... always on time.

CONCLUSION

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, our mind blindness and other maladies that afflict us. Spiritual sight can be restored. Distortions in spiritual consciousness can be refocused. The insight he offers cuts to the optic nerve of our soul to un-cloud, clarify, and correct.

John Killinger tells of a young boy and an old man sitting fishing from a dock. They philosophize, too, of why sunsets are red and who makes the rain fall and why the seasons change and other secrets of the universe. Finally, the boy asks the old man, baiting his hook, "Does anyone ever see God?" The old man answered, "It's getting so I hardly see anything else."

Faith is the optical nerve of the soul offering our spiritual eyes a broadened outlook. Faith gives us the assurance of things hoped for and the conviction of things not seen. Trust the up-look, not the outlook.

Closing prayer

God of light, in the blindness of our hearts we too have refused to see wonder to be wonder, beauty to be beauty, miracle to be miracle, your nearness to be real. Open our eyes that we may see, O God.

Amen