

First Presbyterian Church, Birmingham, MI
“Windows to the World”
Rev. Lou Nyiri
February 4, 2024

Psalm 121 / Ephesians 1:15-22

Psalm 121 (New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition)

Assurance of God’s Protection

A Song of Ascents.

- ¹ I lift up my eyes to the hills—
from where will my help come?
² My help comes from the Lord,
who made heaven and earth.
³ He will not let your foot be moved;
he who keeps you will not slumber.
⁴ He who keeps Israel
will neither slumber nor sleep.
⁵ The Lord is your keeper;
the Lord is your shade at your right hand.
⁶ The sun shall not strike you by day
nor the moon by night.
⁷ The Lord will keep you from all evil;
he will keep your life.
⁸ The Lord will keep
your going out and your coming in
from this time on and forevermore.

Ephesians 1:15-22 (New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition)

Paul’s Prayer

¹⁵ I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love^[a] toward all the saints, and for this reason ¹⁶ I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers, ¹⁷ that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, ¹⁸ so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may perceive what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, ¹⁹ and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power. ²⁰ God^[b] put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places,^[c] ²¹ far above all rule and authority and power and dominion and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come. ²² And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church,

Let us Pray:

Come, O Holy Spirit, come.
Come as the fire and burn,
Come as the wind and cleanse,
Come as the light and reveal,
Convict us, Convert us, Consecrate us...until we are wholly thine.

And now, Lord, my prayer is simply this:
That the words of my mouth

And the words of all our hearts will be found pleasing and acceptable to you,
for you are our rock and our redeemer...Amen.

Sermon

A young child – maybe 4 or 5 – was talking to his father who was deep in thought in their home office. The child was excitedly telling his Daddy about a something important to him. The father acknowledged his son with stunted grunts as he typed away intently on his laptop.

“Yes.”

“Mm-hmm.”

“Good.”

Exasperated, his son, said, “Daddy, you’re not listening to me.”

“I am,” declared the father – not lifting his gaze from laptop screen – “I heard everything. Backyard. Playset. Big caterpillar. Cocoon.”

He had heard the words.

Then he felt two smallish hands take hold of his cheeks – turn his head to the right & down – staring into the eyes of his son now, the child declared, “Listen with your eyes, Daddy.”

Listen with your eyes.

Our eyes reveal a lot.

To this child eyes revealed whether a parent was fully present & listening to the conversation.

To a parent eyes might reveal guilt – while declaring innocence.

To a friend they reveal discontent – even if words purport all is well with our soul.

Body language expert, Janine Driver, says that [even] when the nose, mouth and chin [are covered], we [can] recognize *If a person is friendly?*

“[A] lot of information shows up in the eyes and eyebrows,” according to Driver, “It’s still worth it to smile while [your mouth may be covered because] with true happiness, we see it with the wrinkles on the side of our eyes.”

I (Lou Nyiri) plan to use this information because now I’m going to tell people, ‘*Those aren’t wrinkles around my eyes. I’m just truly happy.*’

Think about it this way, when a baby’s smile is covered by a pacifier – we know they’re smiling because it shows up in their eyes.

- Relaxed eyes mean a person is feeling comfortable. They begin to narrow, as if threading a needle, and we wonder...is the person stressed, upset, or feeling threatened?
- Pupils dilate when we feel comfortable; they constrict when we see something we don’t like.
- Driver notes, “If you can see the white [area] of the eyes ‘north, south, east and west’ of the iris, that person is afraid.”¹

Driver continues:

¹ <https://www.today.com/health/smile-behind-face-mask-can-be-recognized-others-body-language-t183257>

- You can tell sadness when a person’s inner eyebrows are pulled together and up, one of the hardest muscles to manipulate.
- The brows come down in anger and up in surprise.

Our eyes reveal: Joy / Pain // Happiness / Sadness // Hope / Despair

“Our eyes,” Peter Marty writes, “serve as windows into the world.”²

The eyes help us to see & make sense of the world.

The eyes communicate something of who we are & what we’re feeling.

It is helpful to think of this as seeing the world through the “eyes” of our heart.

German theologian, Helmut Thielicke spoke of compassion as beginning in the eyes...of one’s heart. In a sense, Thielicke is talking about what eyes project & give off, not what they absorb or receive.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said to a crowd, “...your eye is the lamp of your body,”³ and the healthier that eye is the more light there is within you.

Concluding his conversation about the health of one’s eyes, Jesus uses these words, “If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!”⁴

The Psalmist writes,

I lift up my eyes to the hills –
 from where will my help come?
 My help comes from the LORD,
 Who made heaven and earth.

He who keeps you will not slumber.
 [He] will neither slumber nor sleep.
 The LORD is your keeper;
 [The LORD] will keep your life.

The LORD will keep your going out...
 and your coming in...
 From this time on...
 and forevermore.

I recall attending a meeting of clergy one afternoon where the speaker asked us to begin a daily routine of “Looking out the window & making note:

- What do you see? //
- What is bringing you joy? //
- What nourishes you? //
- Where is God’s Spirit billowing the sails of your soul? //

I lift my eyes up to the hills –

² *The Christian Century*, August 26, 2020, p. 3. (Marty is editor/publisher of *The Christian Century* & senior pastor at St. Paul Lutheran Church in Davenport, Iowa.

³ Matthew 5-6

⁴ Matthew 6:22-23

from where does my help come?
My help comes from the LORD,
who made heaven and earth.

We need...we yearn for:

- Renewed Vision.
- Relaxed Breath.
- Refocused Outlook.

I lift my eyes up to the hills – *(the Psalmist says)*
from where does my help come?
My help comes from the LORD,
who made heaven and earth.

One habit to come from that speaker's prompt is what we could call the "4-4-4 rule"

- 4 days a week
- Every 4 hours
- Take 4 minutes to focus on faith
 - Those 4 minutes could go as follows:
 - 1 minute to breath – to center: Take in God's creation – or – just breath...
 - 1 minute to read: your Bible – or – Devotional
 - 1 minute to pray: reflect on your quiet time – or – your Bible/Devotional
 - 1 minute to write: jot down the thoughts which arose during your time with God – put them down in writing – or – see them in your mind's eye.

In a sense, this gets at Paul's Prayer for the Ephesians:
I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ...
may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation
as you come to know him, so that,

With the eyes of your heart enlightened,
You may know what is the hope to which [God] has called you,
What are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints,

[and] What is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe,
According to the working of [God's] great power. (Ephesians 1:18-19)

When we lift our eyes up to the hills – we know from where our help comes
We believe (even if it's fishing-line thin belief) our help comes from the LORD
who does not sleep & who will keep...
our lives...
from this time on & forevermore.

It is good to remember – our greatest identifier is as God's people - & - as such, we
remember...that we belong...'heart & soul to Almighty God.'

With the eyes of our hearts enlightened (Paul writes)...
we lean into hope...
trusting in the immeasurable power of God

- These are declarations which nourish & fill our souls.
- These are declarations which bring joy.
- These are akin to healthy light *Jesus mentions on that Sermon mount* – which shine into & shine through us.

As Madeleine L'Engle writes, "We do not draw people to Christ by loudly discrediting what they believe, by telling them how wrong they are and how right we are, but by showing them a light that is so lovely that they want with all their hearts to know the source of it."

This is what we are called to share with the world.

As we engage with the world around us, may our prayer be something like this⁵:

Creator,
 as we go into the world,
 may our lives be lived in such ways
 that your love will be seen in the
 tangible ways we embody
 love for neighbors,
 as we love ourselves.

Christ,
 uncover our hearts,
 that people would see smiles
 in the crinkles around our eyes.
 Help us to speak clearly,
 not only with words,
 also with actions.

Holy Spirit,
 remind us to listen carefully—
 and full of care—
 to all those we meet.
 May each breath we breath,
 be filled with your love.

In your Name and
 in that love,
 we pray.

May it be so.
 May it be so.

Amen & Amen.

⁵ I have adapted these words from Rev. Dr. Richard Bott's, *A Prayer as I Put on My Mask*.