

“A Heart to Give: The Heart’s Eyes”

Ephesians 1:15-23

October 17, 2021

We may call this the “Letter to the Ephesians,” but in my mind it reads more like poetry or, better yet, like a lyrical prayer. The expressions and images cascade on the readers in waves of theological insight and rhetorical power. Like all good poetry, the language of Ephesians slows us down. It is not making a point. It is creating a world of words and inviting us into it, inviting us to see our world differently because of it. In Ephesians, the foundation is built on blessing—praise of God for the extraordinary gifts of creation and redemption, adoption and belonging. And so Ephesians begins where all theology should begin—with God. The verses read like a catalogue of praise, like a hymn of adoration and gratitude. God has blessed us in Christ; God has chosen us in Christ; God has destined us for adoption in Christ; God’s glorious grace has been given freely to us; God has made known the mystery of God’s will; God will gather up all things; God lavished grace on us; God accomplishes all things according to the divine counsel and will. God. God. God. The interesting thing about religion is God, and God takes centerstage in this run-on sentence of overflowing praise.

And so the letter begins. But then, in verse fifteen, there is a subtle but substantial shift in subject and focus. The letter’s writer, the poet, speaks for the first time in first person. *I have heard of your faith. I have heard of your love for all the saints.* The prayer turns from praise to the personal. The vision turns from all of creation to the church. I give thanks for *you*. I pray for you. For a spirit of wisdom. For revelation. For knowledge of God’s glory and greatness. For the courage to persevere in the face of adversity. Embedded in this prolific petition there is a phrase that captures the unique call of the Christian community in our time. Here I must confess that I

had never paid attention to it until I read Frederick Buechner’s book by the same name. The phrase is this: The eyes of the heart. The prayer for the church is that God will open our heart’s eyes.

How are we to understand this evocative image? And what are we to make of this metaphor? Buechner describes a moment forever etched in his memory. He writes, “That day, standing on the staircase, when I met my first grandchild for the first time, what I saw with the eyes of my head was a very small boy with silvery gold hair and eyes the color of blue denim coming down toward me in his mother’s arms. What I saw with the eyes of my heart was a life that, without a moment’s hesitation, I would have given my life for.” Buechner concludes, “To look through those eyes is to see every kingdom as magic.”ⁱ

Second Church, hear this: To see with the eyes of the heart is to reimagine *every* encounter and *each* moment as capable of containing God’s truth and goodness.

Of course it is natural to see the presence of God in a newborn baby, a starlit sky, a mountain vista. But it takes the eyes of the heart to see God’s presence in your morning commute, or the doctor’s office waiting room, to see the presence of God in your cranky coworker or your toddler or teenager with a temper. This, I think, is why we pray that the eyes of our heart will be opened—so that we can see God at work in the extraordinary and even in the exasperating.

Children are, I think, our best instructors in this practice. Last Friday evening I received a text from a friend, a member of this congregation. The text was a picture of their two young children sitting in a Target shopping cart, in the middle of the Target parking lot, with a beautiful double rainbow

behind them. The message described how the four year old had looked up at the sky and said, “Look, Daddy! Jesus and Target can do anything!” When we make a practice of seeing with our heart’s eyes, we see everything differently. The eyes of the heart reimagine this tiring, trying, tedious world as the theater of God’s glory. Indeed the only place where we encounter the glory of God is this world, this human world.

I’m paraphrasing here, but the great Reformer John Calvin used to say that faith in Christ is like getting a new pair of glasses. I don’t know about you, but forty is fast approaching, and I’m due for a pair. I find that I’m tired of these foggy lenses of apathy and indifference I’ve been given, that I’m burned out on the jaded perception of my fellow human creatures as my enemies, or diversity as divisive, or the callous conclusion that only by force will a new world break through. No, friends, we have a different set of glasses to wear. We have to see and show another way, another perspective, another vision. And so we pray, “God, open the eyes of our hearts to see this world through *your* heart’s eyes.”

Why? According to Ephesians, you do it “So that... you may know the hope to which God has called you.” Listen to that. The eyes of the heart can see the future. Think about this. The future is filled with hope. *Hope*. How can I say that? Not because I’m naive, ignorant, simplistic, or even particularly optimistic most of the time, but because my heart’s eyes see that the future rests in the hands of God. For followers of Jesus Christ, who have seen the love of God in human form, hope will never again be an abstract concept. Hope has a name and a face. Hope has a voice and a body. Your voice, our body. We Christians find our hope in Jesus Christ, in *his* way of seeing. Jesus, who looked not with disdain, but rather with compassion, on all who were suffering. Jesus, who looked with forgiveness and not judgement on those who had messed it up too many times. Jesus, through whom God looked at a world in need of saving and said, “This world is worth extravagant, vulnerable love.”

Hope has a name. Because of this, we plunge ourselves into the work of ministry to which we have been called. Hope urges us on. Equipped and charged up by the Spirit who animates our lives, we open our heart’s eyes to the presence of God in every direction.

Now, I know you are tired. I know you may be discouraged. I know your hearts may be weary. There is, I think, this pernicious and insatiable cynicism at work in the world today that is always threatening to overtake us. This cynicism screams in our face that faith in the God of hope is merely a pretend piety or a sanctified ignorance. It insists that the only reasonable path is addiction to acquisition or obsession with self. Through the lens of cynicism every encounter is competition, every neighbor is rival, every stranger is enemy. The outlook is always bleak, the future forever foreboding. And we can choose that lens. We can choose to see through the lens of cynicism our lives. We can choose to see through the lens of cynicism our church. We can choose to see the world that way. We may even find some comfort in such a perspective. I’ll tell you a secret: That perspective can justify your anger, vindicate your feelings of contempt, excuse your actions.

But what would happen if instead, right here, we chose to see through the eyes of our hearts? What if somehow somehow hope is truer than cynicism? What if the world is worth saving? What if our city is worth serving? What if God is not finished with us yet?

It is commitment season here at Second Church. Last week, I urged you to examine your priorities, invest in what lasts, let the practice of giving shape your way of living. One of you told me that you were squirming a bit in the pews last Sunday. Well, today I’m asking you to see, through the eyes of your heart, a future of extraordinary possibility, and I’m asking you to consider your own call as an indispensable part of that future. I’m asking you to see through the eyes of your heart.

Friends, what do you see with the eyes of your heart enlightened?

I see reaffirmed commitment, in a new chapter, to the ministries that have always defined Christian community: the centrality of vibrant worship, the nurture and formation of Jesus followers, compassionate care, hospitality, outreach to the overlooked and ignored.

I imagine with my heart's eyes a church that sees with the eyes of the heart for the city of Indianapolis in a moment of great promise and great peril in our community. I imagine new vistas, focused on a public presence in our city, expanding avenues for hands-on impact and investment.

I see this sacred space filled with all kinds of people who gather to give thanks, to pray, to center their lives and serve their neighbors, to connect with each other, to belong to God, to be transformed by Jesus Christ. With the eyes of my heart, I dream of a charged-up community of disciples whose ministry begins at the doors of the church, who emit hope like rays of light wherever we go. And then I see with my heart's eyes a people, a neighborhood, a city, shaken up by this vision of hope in practice.

When God opens our heart's eyes, visions of hope and acts of generosity come as pure gift. This is why our family commits to tithing from the abundance God has offered us. Second is our home, and we want this place to be a home for all who have not yet found it, a charging station, a courageous, missional, impactful community of faith for generations yet to come. We see that future, and we want to be a part of bringing it about.

Most mornings, I have the joy of taking our son Ben to his pre-K at drop-off time. Okay, it's not *always* a joy. Ben doesn't always want to go. Okay, that's not quite true. Ben *never* wants to go. It can be a struggle. So Ben and I have a partnership. We've developed some strategies for the car ride, some imaginary games, a number of different distractions. We've made up songs. I've created something called the power snack, a creative combination of Cheez-Its and candy corn. I give pep talks. One of the games involves Ben and me battling a pack of monsters

who have taken over all the trees on our journey from home to pre-K. Last week, fearful of Ben's many powers brought about by the candy corn, those monsters suddenly became invisible. "Ben!" I said. "They're hiding! We can't see them. They're invisible. What will we do?"

Ben's response? "No sweat, Dad. I have super vision." *Super vision*. The eyes of the heart. Our super vision is the God-given capacity to see the goodness of God and a vision of hope everywhere we turn.

This morning, don't leave this place without taking some time to look around you. See the faces of those who are more than your neighbors—God's children, called to be a community of grace. This morning, with the eyes of your heart, your super vision, see the faithful saints who shaped your faith and those who gave sacrificially to lay the foundations of this ministry. With the eyes of your heart illumined, see a future overflowing with newness in the faces of children and youth. See those children gathered on these stairs, as God's promise for the future. Super vision. With the eyes of your heart, travel beyond these pews because there are children of God whose names you will never know but whose hearts are bound to yours. See a city worth serving. See a world worth loving.

And then, with the eyes of your heart, your super vision, peer into your own unique human soul. See the abundance of God within you. See the goodness of God longing for expression in your life. See your gifts waiting to be activated in new ways. See your purpose—the reason God put you right here, right now. Use that super vision to survey the immeasurable gifts of God in every direction. And then respond...from the heart. Amen.

¹ Frederick Buechner, *The Eyes of the Heart: A Memoir of the Lost and Found*, Harper San Francisco, 1999, pp. 165-166.

