

Psalm 121 / Ephesians 1:15-22

“Smiling Eyes”

November 8, 2020

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### **Title Slide**

This morning’s text will be Ephesians 1:15-22 & Psalm 121...lean in & listen attentively...

### **Scripture Slides – Ephesians 1:15-22 & Psalm121**

### **Title Slide**

#### **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 heard to the right & down – staring into the eyes of his son now, the child declared, “Listen with your eyes, Daddy.”

Our eyes reveal a lot.

To this child eyes revealed if a parent was fully present & listening to their conversation.  
To a parent they might reveal guilt – while declaring innocence.  
To a friend they reveal discontent – even if words purport all is well with our soul.

In Agnes Pawlowski's article, "*Can others recognize your smile behind a mask? Body language expert weighs in*" – body language expert, Janine Driver, answers "yes" to the question, when the nose, mouth and chin disappear behind a covering, will we recognize *If a person is friendly? If you smile, will [the other person] know it?*

"[A] lot of information shows up in the eyes and eyebrows," according to Driver, "It's still worth it to smile while wearing a mask [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."<sup>1</sup>

Driver continues:

- 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.

Bottom line, according to Pawlowski's article, "Our face is huge when it comes to showing emotions, even when a large part of it is covered up. [So,] [k]eep smiling behind the mask."

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

"Our eyes," Peter Marty writes, "serve as windows into the world."<sup>2</sup>

While our eyes allow us to interpret sights – they also help us to see & make sense of the world. Eyes are meant to be seen.

To communicate something of who we are & what we're feeling.

This may be the reason we are drawn first to a person's eyes before other facial features.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.today.com/health/smile-behind-face-mask-can-be-recognized-others-body-language-t133257>

<sup>2</sup> *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.)

Eyes provide valuable information into a person's thoughts – or – what someone might do next. Think about this the next time someone speaks to you or another with kind words & harsh eyes.

German theologian, Helmut Thielicke spoke of compassion as beginning in the eyes... 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,"<sup>3</sup> and the healthier that eye is the more light there is within you.

Lamps don't interpret – Lamps illuminate.

Lamps don't absorb – they give off light.

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!"<sup>4</sup>

So, if our eyes give off...

what they give off...

in a very real way...

is influenced by what they take in.

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.

The Presbyterian Church (USA)'s medical coverage plan encourages members to participate annually in a *Call to Health*. Participants are required to,

1. Get an annual preventive exam every 24 months with their primary care provider.

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<sup>3</sup> Matthew 5-6

<sup>4</sup> Matthew 6:22-23

2. Fill out a health assessment which consists of twenty minutes clicking answers to an online questionnaire – covering four key areas: Spiritual, Health, Financial & Vocational – the results show areas where you excel and which areas you might want to consider.

The program is designed that plan participants will maintain healthy habits to find balance which develops not only more wholesome living – it empowers one with the energy to better serve others and communities.

After the requirements are completed, participants are encouraged to keep going and fulfill two more levels by accumulating points for doing healthy things, like: check bank balances weekly, walk 10,000 steps daily.

Each level earns a Tango Gift card – and once I complete each level – I’ll google what a Tango gift card is... 😊.

One of my health assessment suggestions was *Take a Break from the Screen*.

The activity reminds us that we often spend a lot of time staring at screens: Computer Monitors/ Laptops/ Tablets / Smartphones.

Our eyes may feel strained, tired – some might experience blurry vision.

To protect our eyes & exercise our vision, the suggested activity is to look away from the monitor throughout the day and stare at a distant object.

This act helps rest your eyes and causes you to blink more, which rejuvenates your eyes.

Eye doctors refer to this as the “20-20-20 rule” – advising us to look up from our monitors – glance out the window or across the room - & fix our eyes on something at least 20 feet away, for about 20 seconds, every 20 minutes.

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.

Early in the pandemic, Carlisle Presbytery’s Interim Executive Presbyter, Rev. Cheryl Galan, asked a question of clergy on a zoom meeting in which I was participating – “Look out the window daily & 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 –

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.

Perhaps we might engage in what I'll call *Spiritual Ophthalmology* as a Healthy Habit – we could call it 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: Look out the window at creation – or – close your eyes & 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 on paper – 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.

Even in the midst of *Pandemics & Presidential elections* we 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.

For, 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.

Even amid this brief time when we find ourselves practicing physical distancing & wearing masks – we can share light & life with those around us.

Remember, we still get to see each other's eyes.

Eyes send out valuable cues pertaining to life – everything from corner eye turns indicating a smile to tears of sadness to true compassionate expressions<sup>5</sup> [to wrinkles around the eyes conveying true happiness & joy.]

The following, by Rev. Dr. Richard Bott, Moderator of the United Church of Canada, I believe, captures this nicely, it is something I have begun pondering as I mask up in to go out & about.

It is called, *A Prayer as I Put on My Mask*, & I close with it this morning:

Creator,  
as I prepare to go into the world,  
help me to see the sacrament  
in the wearing of this cloth—  
let it be "an outward sign  
of an inward grace"—  
a tangible and visible way of living  
love for my neighbors,  
as I love myself.

Christ,  
since my lips will be covered,  
uncover my heart,  
that people would see my smile  
in the crinkles around my eyes.  
Since my voice may be muffled,  
help me to speak clearly,

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., *The Christian Century*.

not only with my words,  
but with my actions.

Holy Spirit,  
As the elastic touches my ears,  
remind me to listen carefully—  
and full of care—  
to all those I meet.  
May this simple piece of cloth be  
shield and banner,  
and each breath that it holds,  
be filled with your love.

In your Name and  
in that love,  
I pray.

May it be so.  
May it be so.

Amen & Amen.

