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Series: Great Hymns of the Faith
Sermon: Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus

Colossians 3:1-4; 12-17 (NIV)

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. 3 For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

12 Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. 13 Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. 14 And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

15 Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. 16 Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. 17 And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him

Sermon

I used to have a bad habit. I probably still have a few, but this is one I tried to break years ago. I was on staff at a church that had 4,000 people. Get that? 4,000. Not that I knew them all - I was the part time evening guy and assistant youth director - the guy still in college. Every Sunday, I'd get a few youth to go outside with me and greet worshipers coming in. And greet and greet and greet. Might be why I still like to greet today out front before worship. And every now and then they'd let me preach, so I got to see them all at once, or at least over the 4 services that we had. Well, you greet 4,000 people week in and week out, year in and year out, you get to know some faces. Our city had 200,000 people. So if you recognize 4,000, out of 200,000 - especially the folk on your side of town who came to your church, so lets say 50,000 folk. 4,000 out of 50,000 people is 8%. When we were anywhere near the church - at a restaurant, at the mall, we would know one in 12 people. We couldn't get away with anything. Even a cop who pulled me over. It got to be a game for us, how many St. Markians are we gonna see today? And if we were sitting in a restaurant, enjoying our food, every time the front door would open, or if someone was about to leave, I'd look over. Do I know them? Do I not know them? I would break off conversations to look - whose coming in. My bad habit was this - I couldn't keep my eyes or my attention on the things right in front of me. I was like a little puppy dog. What's going on over here? What's going on over there? (Looking forward), Hi. What we're you saying? Oh, look, what's going on over here? It's not exactly a sign of respect. We all do that a little bit, don't we? You're standing there talking to Bob, and your phone goes off. Hey, it's Steve! Hold on Bob - I gotta talk to Steve. And, if you were standing there talking to Steve, and your phone goes off. Hey, it's Bob! Hold on Steve, I gotta talk to Bob. Who should I talk to? Bob or Steve? Apparently it's who got my attention last. My bad habit was not paying attention to what was happening in the moment. I'm at work, and I'm thinking about things at home. I'm at home, thinking about things at work. Focus on where you're at. There's not really a support group for this, HI, I'M MIKE. AND I CANT FOCUS. That would be an interesting support group - a group that can't focus on what's happening right now. HI, I'M MIKE, AND I CAN'T FOCUS. "Hi, whatever you just said your name was."

Numerous studies have shown that people who make higher-levels of eye contact with others are perceived as

being: More dominant and powerful; AS WELL AS More warm and personable; More attractive and likeable; More qualified, skilled, competent, and valuable; More trustworthy, honest, and sincere; More confident and emotionally stable. And not only does increased eye contact make you seem more appealing in pretty much every way to those you interact with, it also improves the quality of that interaction. Eye contact imparts a sense of intimacy to your exchanges, and leaves the receiver of your gaze feeling more positive about your interaction and connected to you. In short, making greater eye contact with others can increase the quality of all of your face-to-face interactions; there's no area of your life where being seen as more attractive, confident, and trustworthy wouldn't be a good thing. Being able to look people in the eye and hold their gaze can help you better network with others, (PIC) land a job, pitch an idea, make a moving speech, woo a lover, and intimidate your enemies. It can help a lawyer win over a jury, a boxer psych out his opponent, a teacher teach, and a minister connect with her congregants. It can even aid a musician in winning over new fans; studies have shown that the more eye contact a musician makes with an audience, the more they enjoy the music!

Why does making eye contact with people have such a dramatic effect in improving relationships? Here are four quick answers:

First, our eyes were made to connect. It's easy to see why the eyes of others capture our gaze: they're free-moving orbs lodged in an otherwise stationary face; eyeballs can move on their own! Eyeballs are really kind of weird when you think about them, aren't they? But they also grab our attention for a reason that is distinctly human. While our irises and pupils float on a bright white canvas, none of the other 220 species of primates have white in their eyes at all, we are the only ones! (PIC) The whites of our eyes make it very easy for others to see exactly what we're looking at and notice when our focus changes direction. While primates will typically turn their gaze in the direction a person points his whole head towards, a human infant is more likely to follow the person's eyes, regardless of which way the person's head is tilted. Anthropologists think our uniquely human eyes evolved to help us achieve a greater level of cooperation with others, which is helpful in survival and building a civilization. All of which is to say: your eyes were made to communicate with the eyes of other people.

Second, our eyes reveal our thoughts and feelings. You've probably heard the old expression: "The eyes are the window to the soul." While that may not be literally true, they do reveal a great deal about what we're really thinking and feeling from moment to moment. Think of all the eye-related expressions we have in our language. We're seduced by "bedroom eyes," wary of "shifty eyes," (PIC) and afraid of getting the "evil eye." We're attracted to people who have "kind eyes" and eyes that "sparkle," "glow," or "twinkle," while we're repelled by those who are "dead behind the eyes." When someone is eager and peppy we say they're "bright-eyed;" when they're bored we describe their eyes as "glazed over." Love stories in both fiction and real life very often begin with two pairs of eyes meeting across a room. And the singer Bryan Adams says you can gauge your love for a woman from your ability to see your unborn children in her eyes! Kind of romantic, kind of creepy.

Third, eye contact shows attention. Sociologists tell us that people are starved for attention these days. Despite the fact that we're more "connected" than ever, folks are hungry for face-to-face interactions and someone to really, sincerely listen to them. Eye contact is the key to showing that you care! It shows the speaker that you're tuned in to what he's saying. Think of how bad you feel when you're talking with someone and he's looking all around the room for someone else to ditch you for. The ability to give eye contact to someone as they speak is an especially powerful tool these days; it has become so common for people to break their gaze to check their phone during a conversation, that giving someone your complete and undivided attention can truly win them over.

Last reason today: Eye contact creates an intimate bond. When I am performing a task or feeling an emotion, and you are observing me do so, the same neurons that are being lit up in my brain by actually having the

experience, are the ones that light up in your brain just from watching me. This is made possible by the presence of “mirror neurons” in our craniums. And the activation of these mirror neurons is especially sensitive to facial expressions, and, you guessed it, eye contact. Have you ever been hit hard with an emotion after looking into the eyes of someone who was experiencing it? Eye contact creates moments where you are able to really feel what someone else is feeling. It links together your emotional states and creates empathy and an intimate bond. This is why when we’re interacting as disembodied selves on the internet, it can be very easy to be angry and hateful to people, but when you see someone face-to-face, and look into their eyes, you often can get a sense of their humanity and your anger greatly dissipates.

What am I trying to say today? Turn your eyes to others - see what they’re going thru. Give them the gift of your eyes, of your glance. We miss out a little on our humanity when we don’t give the world a little eye contact.

This is the last sermon in a series on classic hymns, where they came from. And today, we are looking at Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus. (PIC)

Helen Lemmel was born in 1863 in England to a Methodist minister and his wife - I knew I liked this song for some reason. Her family moved to the United States when she was 12 years old. Her parents recognized her musical gifts, and made it possible for her to study with good teachers. She sang in several groups and toured the Midwest, going from church to church to church. In 1904, in her forties, she moved to Seattle, Washington, where she served as the music critic for the Seattle-Post Intelligencer for three years. After that, she went to Germany to study music, and stayed there four years. She fell in love over there with a wealthy European. Upon her return to the United States, she had a successful concert career—and also taught music for a number of years at the Moody Bible Institute. She actively supported Billy Sunday’s evangelistic ministry, and wrote “Turn Your Eyes upon Jesus” in 1922 to be used in those meetings. The song was inspired by a tract written by Lilius Trotter, a missionary to Algeria. Trotter was writing about the difficulty of maintaining focus while living in a world that provides us with so many choices. Trotter gave this prescription for keeping one’s life moving in the right direction: “Turn your soul’s vision to Jesus, and look and look at Him, and a strange dimness will come over all that is apart from Him.”

Lemmel wrote more than 500 hymns, but “Turn Your Eyes upon Jesus” is the one that has continued to find its way into modern hymnals—and into human hearts. As is true of so many popular hymns, it holds out a promise of Jesus’ help for troubled souls.

O soul, are you weary and troubled?; No light in the darkness you see?
There’s light for a look at the savior; And life more abundant and free.
Turn your eyes upon Jesus,; Look full in His wonderful face,
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim; In the light of his glory and grace.

Something I didn’t tell you. She was just out of middle age, about to start the good years - and she became blind in a relatively short period of time. Her husband left her. Didn’t want to deal with a blind wife. And she lived out her days, back in Seattle, on Government assistance living in someone else’s back bedroom. Not the retirement she was hoping for. Life gave her a few tough blows. And it was when she was blind that she wrote the words we will sing in a little bit - a little irony within the song - but the metaphor is still true. Turn your eyes upon Jesus, said this blind woman, Look full in his wonderful face - give him the attention He deserves. And the things of this earth will grow strangely dim, in the light of his glory and grace. Helen Lemmel died in 1961, at the age of 98. But her song lives on.

If you’re constantly looking around, you might miss the glory and grace right in front of you. And the family of God said, AMEN.