

Paying Attention

From the Bible: Matthew 20: 29-34

Paul Alcorn
Bedford Presbyterian Church
Bedford, NY
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This reflection by Anne Hillman was read as a part of the worship service we attended at the Shepherdstown Presbyterian Church on our way home from our summer work trip. It caught my attention and made me lean in a bit more.

We are all on a journey together...

To the center of the universe...

Look deep

Into yourself, into another.

It is to a center which is everywhere

That is the holy journey...

First you need only look:

Notice and honor the radiance of

Everything about you...

Play in this universe. Then

All these shining things around you:

The smallest plant, the creature and the objects in your care.

Be gentle and nurture. Listen...

As we experience and accept

All that we really are...

We grow in care.

We begin to embrace others

As ourselves, and learn to live

As one among many.

In other words...Pay attention.

And, this story from Matthew's Gospel...

As they were leaving Jericho, a large crowd followed [Jesus]. There were two blind men sitting by the roadside. When they heard that Jesus was passing by, they shouted, "Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!" The crowd sternly ordered them to be quiet; but they shouted even more loudly, "Have mercy on us, Lord, Son of David!" Jesus stood still and called them, saying, "What do you want me to do for you?" They said to him, "Lord, let our eyes be opened." Moved with compassion, Jesus touched their eyes. Immediately they regained their sight and followed him.

In other words...See.

The writer Anne Lamott says there are only four kinds of prayer:

Please.

Thank you.

Help.

Wow.

Being here this morning, I wonder how you pray.

Now I lay me down to sleep...?

Our Father, who art in heaven...?

The Lord is good to me and so I thank the Lord...?

Do you...

Fold your hands?

Close your eyes?

Speak out loud?

Be as quiet as you can?

Is your prayer...

Grace before a meal?

Your morning meditation?

Or, *Oh my God...* whispered as you hear the headlines in the news?

Or, maybe you just wait for Sunday morning and for Heather or me.

After all, while I am 100% sure it is **not** true, on countless occasions I have been asked to pray because I have "*a direct line to the Almighty.*"

What got me thinking about this was something I saw a couple of weeks ago.

A line by the poet Mary Oliver who wrote:

Attentiveness is the beginning of all prayer.

Again...

Attentiveness is the beginning of all prayer.

I used to think prayer was about talking God into something.

Something I wanted.

Something I thought I needed.

Something someone else wanted or needed.

Or, asking God for something and then sitting back and waiting for God to do what I had asked.

But, like my line to the Almighty, I am pretty sure that is *not* what prayer is all about.

Mary Oliver's observation rings true for me.

What if prayer is really about learning...

To pay attention.

To see.

To notice.

To look around.

Could it be that merely *paying attention* becomes our prayer.

Paying attention to the crisis on our borders.
Paying attention to food you are about to eat.
Paying attention to the refugees in makeshift camps cut off from their homes.
Paying attention to the state of your soul.
Paying attention to those who are hungry in our community.
Paying attention to those who sit across from you at the dinner table.
Paying attention to those whom you know who are battling disease.
Paying attention to the warmth of the sun and the coolness of the breeze.
Paying attention to the systemic racism around us.
Paying attention to the money you spend and the checks you write.
Paying attention to those who continue to rebuild their lives in Puerto Rico.
Paying attention to pace of your day.
Paying attention to those who struggle to make ends meet.
Paying attention to the beauty of the flower.
Paying attention to the violence in Nicaragua.
Paying attention to the embrace of another.
Paying attention...
Because there are still bushes which are burning.
And that still, small voice waiting to be heard.
And there are still angels masquerading as strangers.
And visions which remain to be seen.

The Gospel reading this morning was about two blind men consigned to sitting each day in the dirt on the side of the road, beggars hoods pulled up over their faces so others would not *see/notice/pay attention* to their blindness. Two blind men who defy all the cultural norms by crying out to Jesus. And, then, when rebuked, crying out even louder. Then when asked by Jesus what they want, they reply, "*Let our eyes be open.*"

Maybe we, too, sit in the dirt on the side of the road.
Blind.
Lost in some darkness around us.
Not able to see that which is right in front of you.
What happens next?
They asked for their eyes to be opened.
May we be wise enough to the same.
To open our eyes.
To see again or maybe to see for the very first time.
Then to move our feet.
And to allow our lives to follow where our prayers first lead.