



Sermon delivered by
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Quail Hollow Presbyterian Church
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"The Attentive Eye"
(Psalm 147: 1-11, 20)

Parents, but especially mothers, have that "sixth sense." My mother had it, and so did the majority of my friends' mothers. What I refer to is the "x-ray eye," the eye that could see things not visible to the human eye. I doubt my experience is unique; it is the rule, not the exception. My mother could look at me and she could tell, she see into my mind, and, thus, she had the uncanny talent of predicting what was going to happen in my world, and sometimes that was a good thing, and sometimes it wasn't, if you know what I mean.

On a positive note, I learned from my mother how to be observant, how to notice things not seen with the human eye. My mother had an eye for detail, and she taught me the importance of noticing the importance of opening the door for someone, pulling out a chair, or seeing a need and taking care of that need, quietly. Most importantly, my mother taught me to notice when it was appropriate and timely and seemly to say, *Thank you*. With all due respect to the current generation, those whom we call the Millennials, saying *Thank you* appears not to be a priority. I have heard it said that some within that generation possess an entitlement complex. Thus, according to that complex, why say *Thank you* if what you receive is owed to you? Others may see that in a different light, and that is a sermon for another day.

Near the end of the Psalter, the Book of Psalms found in the Old Testament, there is a cluster of psalms that have only one purpose, and that is to give thanks to God, to say *Thank you* to God, and to give God thanks because of God's observant eye. Now, I know people, in addition to my mother, who possess an observant eye. Those people see what is needed or what needs to be done, and guess what? They do it. They don't wait to be told. They don't wait until someone else does it. They take action, and they do it. This congregation is filled with people like that. Some serve with that spirit because they are on a committee, but many serve that way not being on a committee. They serve with an observant eye just because. I caught one of you not long ago doing what you often do. You are always picking up trash both out "there" and in "here." Years ago when I first noticed you picking up litter around

the church campus, I thought you had lost something. I asked you what you were looking for because I found you walking around looking this way and that way. When I caught up with you to ask you what you were looking for, you smiled and you emptied your pockets, and there it all was: trash, litter, bottles, even wine and beer bottles, the stuff the rest of us might have seen but ignored, expecting someone else to pick it up.

Something else comes to mind. It is tempting to believe that when certain things are needed that they just happen magically, like the appearance of a new roll of toilet paper or clean laundry and or emptying the trash can. Things like that don't just happen. Someone makes them happen. Someone takes the time to do what needs done. And when that happens, that's when the rest of us ought to say, must not forget to say, what? *Thank you!*

In Psalm 147, the author of the psalm is giving thanks to God because of the way God uses the divine and observant eye. The psalmist is grateful that the Lord notices the need and fills that need in abundance. *How good it is to sing praises to our God; for God is gracious, and a song of praise is fitting*, not required, not necessary, not mandatory, just fitting. The Hebrew word is often translated, "seemly." I recall that it used to be seemly to stand when a lady entered a room. Remember those days? Psalm 147 is the result of the psalmist connecting the dots and realizing all that God is doing, and all that God has done, and then realizing that God doesn't have to do all those things; instead, God does them because the God is gracious, and doing the things God does is what being gracious is all about.

Once when I was in college, I spent the first night of some break at a friend's home in Winston-Salem. The next morning I was off to Pittsburgh, but I needed to be on my way early, by at least 5 a.m. After I had showered and quietly dressed, I slipped out to my car, where I found my friend's mother waiting to say good-bye, and she was holding a bag lunch for me. She didn't need to do that, get up early and pack me a lunch, but she did; and I was grateful, very grateful, and I thanked my friend's mother profusely, which she didn't expect, it wasn't required, but what my friend's mother did for me was thoughtful, kind, helpful, and it was done with me in mind. When I got home and told *my* mother what my friend's mother had done, my mother began to weep, she was so grateful someone cared for her son like that.

It is all in a day's work, is it not, when it comes to God's observant and discerning eye placed upon us. *How good it is to praise God* because the Lord takes the time to notice us, what we need and what can be done to bless our lives. In verse 2, the psalmist says that *the Lord builds up Jerusalem*. That does not mean the Lord takes shovel in hand. What that means is that the Lord is detailed oriented when it comes to the details of God's people, not

some of the details but **all** of the details. And there is more. God gathers up the outcasts. God heals the brokenhearted. God counts the stars to make sure there is enough light at night, and God even names those stars. God is busy seeing to the details of those who live in this life so that nothing, *nothing* is missing.

Another example of an observant eye. One Christmas, back in the 1980s, Beth and I returned to Pittsburgh for Christmas. We were visiting my mother. During dinner, I happened to mention that I had lost a button off of my winter coat. We finished dinner, did the dishes, sat around and talked, but then Beth and I ended up in front of television set, the color set. Unbeknownst to me, my mother crept off to find a button for my coat. She sewed it on, such that when it came time for us to leave, I noticed that the missing button had reappeared, magically. That memory has remained with me these many years, and every time I feel that button I thank my mother, and I must admit that was a learning moment for me. It dawned on me that that is not unlike how God is at work. *Sing to the Lord with thanksgiving*, because it is not magic! It is the Lord Who is at work providing for us, Who causes the rain to fall, Who gives food to the animals, and Who does such things because it is the Lord's good pleasure that we do not go without.

I hope, I honestly and truly hope you have come to know how gracious God is towards you and your life. I hope you have noticed with *your* eye that God has and uses for our sake a very observant eye. And God gives us more than just the once-over. God gives us a good, hard look because we are the Lord's. We count. We matter to God, and what matters to us matters to our heavenly Father.

And here's something we should not be surprised to learn. In that last verse of the psalm, we are told that God has not dealt with other people like the way God deals with us. Other people, those who could care less about God, who do not fear God, who not give two-hoots about God, those people do it all themselves. And the good Lord lets them be in charge, permits them to do it their way, allows them to sew on their own missing buttons. But for you and me, for those of us who need Someone to look after us, Someone to notice the details, Someone Who waits on us hand-and-foot, the God of Jesus Christ is willing to be there with us and for us. That is why in this life and for the sake of what we believe, there are no coincidences, none. Webster's dictionary defines "coincidence" as a random act that happens accidentally, *accidentally*.

In our theology as followers of Jesus Christ, grace is no accident. Let me repeat: *grace is no accident*. That bag lunch and that sewed on button were not accidents! They happened

because someone saw the need and filled the need. How good it is to sing praises to our God, for our God is gracious, and there is nothing accidental about God's grace, nothing.

And you know reason, don't you? There is nothing accidental about the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Christ was raised from the dead not by accident, but by what? By love, by the loving and merciful and gracious God of Jesus Christ, the God Who raised Jesus as a reminder that in God's hands we are in very good hands, and when we connect the dots of our blessings it should be clear to us that those blessings are no coincidence or accident. They are God's way of telling us, *I love you, and for you I will do anything, anything*. And we know through that cross and through the faith we hold in Jesus Christ that God is not kidding when God speaks those words to us.

Let us pray: O God of grace and goodness, thank You for being to us the God we need but may not always deserve. Thank You for keeping Your watchful eye upon us so that in our time of need we are never at risk. Inspire us to make our praise of You known, widely known, so others may come to know what we have come to know through faith in Jesus, living proof of Your unfailing goodness towards us. Amen.