I mention this because human development continues today, not by looking down at serpents, as Isbell suggests, but by looking up to God. "To you I lift up my eyes, O you who are enthroned in the heavens!" says the psalmist. "As the eyes of servants look to the hand of their master...our eyes look to the Lord our God" (vv. 1-2). The psalmist claims that lifting our eyes, not dropping them, is key for a meaningful relationship with the Creator.

Our ancestors developed snake eyes that enabled them to spot deadly serpents and point them out to others. The question for us today is this: Have we developed servant eyes? Do our eyes follow the hand of the master, look to the Lord, and discern God's ways? The challenge is for us to get our eyes off the ground and focused on God. Our visual acuity must develop into spiritual sight.

Psalm 123 points us to God, the One who is our Sovereign. We often forget this, erroneously believing that we are completely independent, self-reliant, and capable of making it on our own. When we take our eyes off God, the serpents of this world bite us again and again. We desperately need God's guidance and God’s mercy.

Psalm 123 reminds us that we need God's assistance because "we have had more than enough of contempt," and have endured both "the scorn of those who are at ease" and "the contempt of the proud" (vv. 3-4). We do not know the exact identity of the proud oppressors who made the psalmist’s life miserable, but we can see their descendants around us today: rich leaders in Latin America who care little for the struggles of the poor, politicians in China who imprison people simply for owning a Bible, business tycoons and financial schemers in the United States who focus far more on profits than on people.

Around the world, God’s people still endure the contempt of the proud and the scorn of those who are at ease. We need God to help us because we cannot right these wrongs by ourselves. We require a higher power, so we lift our eyes to the One who is "enthroned in the heavens" (v. 1). Real change begins when we look to God, with servant eyes.

History teaches us that the development of spiritual sight has a profound effect on society. In the first centuries after Christ, the Roman Empire was a class-conscious, minority-abusing, weakness-averse society not too different from our own. But over the course of several hundred years, Christianity grew from being a small sect of Judaism to a spiritual refuge for more and more disaffected Greeks and Romans, from runaway slaves and housewives to well-connected aristocrats.

How did this happen? Author Thomas Cahill writes that "Christianity's claim that all were equal before God and all equally precious to him" ran like a charged current through Greco-Roman society. Christianity was a "harbor to women, who had always been kept in the shadows," and to slaves who never had "social dignity or political importance." Even aristocrats joined the Jesus movement: they were sincere and courageous "seekers after truth who had gone quite out of their way to find it."

By the fourth century, the infiltration of Christianity into the Greco-Roman world was so complete that the emperor Constantine legalized it, making it the dominant religion of the Roman Empire. Because people lifted their eyes to Jesus, instead of to the Greek and Roman gods, the world became a different place.

Society weas not perfect when Constantine was baptized. The old snake of Eden still lurked in the shadows, and he continues to make trouble today. But conditions do improve when people discover that they are all equal before God and equally precious to God. Our world becomes a better place when people follow Jesus, their servant Lord, and when they look to God with servant eyes. **Good sight helps us to see opportunities for change.**

In congregations across our country, Christians are learning the power of service through mission trips. From Fairfax Presbyterian Church in Virginia, a group called the Midlife Men on a Mission travels to Honduras every year in support of a medical clinic, a Youth for Christ camp, and a Christian boarding school for the poor. The men who make this trip each year have professional power in the United States: they include the president of an energy company, an international trade attorney, and an engineer in charge of mine safety. But they tap into a different kind of power when they travel to Honduras, the power that comes from being a servant of God.

But you do not have to travel that far to find people in need. There are hungry and homeless people in Fergus Falls. There is social and economic inequality right here. There are political divisions and religious differences. The world is still not perfect, but the servants of Jesus bring the message that all of God's children are equally precious.

Our congregation’s plan for 2021 is Preach, Teach, and Reach. We will preach Christ crucified and raised for the forgiveness of sins and the promise of new and better life now and in the future. We will teach the Word of God, which says that all God’s people are equally precious. We will reach out into our community embodying God’s love and justice to our neighbors.

Our spiritual development continues today, as we look up to the Lord with the eyes of a servant. It is no longer enough for us to avoid snakebites. We must see the human needs that are all around us, and then work together as followers of Christ to alleviate both physical and spiritual poverty. Only then will we see God, eye to eye.

**Sources:**

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**Servant Eyes**

Sunday, November 15, 2020 Psalm 123

Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN

In the movie, *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, archaeologist Indiana Jones locates the Well of Souls, the repository for the Ark of the Covenant. As Jones and his friend, Sallah, peer into the abyss, Sallah wonders aloud why the floor is moving? “Snakes!” says Jones. “Why did it have to be snakes?” To which Sallah adds, “Asps…very dangerous.”

Most human beings are not kindly disposed toward snakes. According to the World Health Organization, an estimated 5.4 million people are bitten by snakes each year with up to 2.7 million envenomings (transfer of poison). Of those bitten, approximately 138,000 people die. Bites by venomous snakes can cause paralysis that restricts breathing, bleeding disorders that can lead to fatal hemorrhages, irreversible kidney failure, and tissue damage which can cause permanent disability and limb amputation. We have good reason to be wary of snakes!

Perhaps that is why rolling a pair of ones in dice is called “snake eyes!” It is considered bad luck and is a losing roll in many games. Our ancestors had snake eyes; but for them, it was quite lucky. Over time, says Anthropologist Lynne A. Isbell, our ancient relatives developed eyes that enabled them to detect and avoid their most dangerous predator, the snake. This characteristic allowed them to survive and thrive. Isbell says that looking down was crucial to the survival of human beings.

More importantly, snake-spotting shaped the growth of brains, leading to the development of language. Isbell argues that once our ancestors were able to spot serpents, they began to point them out and to communicate the danger to others. This pointing was a critical step in the development of language, which transmitted information that served the good of the community.