

SEE EVERY MOMENT AS A GIFT

July 24, 2022

With Guest Minister Rev. Dr. Michele Whittington

Hi, everyone! Good morning! it is so nice to be here!

I'm going to start with telling you a story ... We're going to talk today about, "See Every Moment -- Every Moment! -- as a Gift." And there will be gifts today given out, because that's what I want to do today. And I'm going to start with a story because I wanted to give a nod to Rev. Richard Maraj, who always starts with a story. And this one is probably just as much of a groaner as his are when he shares his stories! [Congregation laughs]

So this story is about two little boys who are twins. And they look exactly alike, but that's the only thing that's similar between the two of them. They are as opposite as night and day. If one thinks it's too cold in the room, the other thinks it's too hot. If one thinks the TV is too loud, the other thinks it's not loud enough. One is an absolute complete pessimist about life; the other one is a bright-eyed optimist.

It was their birthday, and the dad decided he was just going to do a little experiment, just to see how these kids would react. He knew their natures, but he just wanted to see. So for the pessimistic child, he bought every possible present he could think of -- every new game; every new gadget that he thought his son would want -- and filled his room with all that stuff.

For the optimistic kid, he filled his room with [pause] horse manure. [Congregation laughs] So the kids go off to their rooms to celebrate their birthday. The dad sneaks in, listens to what's happening in the pessimist's room. And he is crying; the kid is crying! And so dad opens the door and says, "*Why are you crying?*"

He says, "*Well, my friends are going to be so jealous of all this stuff. And I've got all these manuals now I've got to read how to figure out how to play these toys. And they're all going to need batteries, which are going to go out, and then I'll have to replace the batteries. And they're going to break. Ugh.*" [Congregation laughs]

Dad thought, "*Well; there's my pessimistic son.*"

Walked into the other room and his son is jumping up and down, laughing and singing and so happy! He's jumping up and down in his room in the horse manure. And the dad said, "*Son, tell me; why are you so happy?*"

And he said, "*Because, Dad, with all these horse [Ahem] in the room, there has got to be a pony in here somewhere!*" [Congregation laughs and applauds]

Now I have a question for you, and the first one I see who answers this gets a gift. For whom was that the first time you'd ever heard that joke? Alright; right there. Jennifer! Okay. There's your gift for this morning.

Wow! I thought everyone had heard that joke ... but not everyone had. Even if you had heard it, it's a great one, isn't it? Looking for the pony ... thank you! And that's what we're going to talk about today: looking for the gift -- looking for the pony -- in every moment, even when that moment might be filled with horse manure. [Laughs]

Our work today is based around a book. Great book; love this book! I think every spiritual student should have this book. It's full of inspiration and information and beautiful ways to look at life. And it's called *Through God's Eyes: Finding Peace and Purpose in a Troubled World*. A good book to have on our bookshelves today. Finding peace and purpose in a troubled world by seeing through God's eyes. It's written by Phil Bolsta: B-O-L-S-T-A. Bolsta. And here's a quote from the book that is going to inform us today;

"All it takes is a shift in perspective to recognize and appreciate life's gifts, even when -- especially when -- what you are experiencing seems like anything but a gift."

Like I said, I love this book. I love everything in it. It's inspirational, and that quote is very inspirational. AND I will tell you: three little words in it kind of made me a little irritated. [Congregants laugh] And they are, "All it takes ..."

All it takes! All it takes is a flick of a wrist and the fly goes away. Yes.

All it takes is a stroke of a key on your computer and you have the answer to your question. Or on your phone, and you have the answer to your question.

All it takes is a push of a button and, in two minutes, ta da! You have hot soup.

All it takes, parents, is for you to give your kids "the look," and they know they're in big trouble. [Congregants laugh]

All it takes ... easy peasy! All it takes ... is a shift in perspective. Yeah. [Laughs] That one might not quite be so easy when we are looking at something challenging. When we're looking at a difficulty. When we're looking at tragedy. When we're looking at life experiences ... I found that statement a little cavalier. "All it takes ..."

But that was just my ego wanting to get ... or as I have often said: I just wanted to get my panties in a bunch about that. And if you get your panties in a bunch about that ... Is that a spiritual term? [Congregants laugh] I think it is. I think it is! I invite you to unwrap them [laughs] and just hear what I have to say about this idea that all it takes is a shift in perspective.

The question is: How do we do that? How do we do that?

But when I really started thinking about this statement, and got out of my own little snit, I realized there's, of course, truth -- complete and total truth -- in that. Complete truth!

Jesus told us -- Master Teacher Jesus said -- "You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." The truth will set you free! I had a minister colleague of mine say to me once, though, that, "Yeah, but what Jesus didn't say is, 'But at first it's really going to tick you off.'" [Congregants laugh]

So that's what this statement did to me! But I've gotten over that, so I ask you to get over that, too, so we can have a conversation about what it takes to make that shift.

And when we make the shift, not only do we get to find the gift that's in the moment, we grow spiritually. That's the big gift! We grow in who we know ourselves to be, and how we show up in life. In how we live from out God-center. And, as the title of that book said, see life through God's eyes, which are our eyes.

So this morning I'm going to share with you some quotes. And this is going to be an interactive time; I love to do interactive things, so I hope you're awake. Wake up! Because I'm going to share some quotes, and the one who can tell me who said it the soonest -- and that I can hear and identify -- you will get a gift. And that gift is a kiss! [Congregation laughs] Alright; it's a chocolate kiss [laughs] -- is what you're going to get. A kiss in the form of chocolate.

And when I had my own center -- felt like a lifetime ago -- I used to love to do this kind of thing and have congregant participation. And I would toss chocolate, right? How many of you have caught my chocolate? Yes; look at all my friends who have caught chocolate! Right? Well, I have to tell you, this Sanctuary is just a tiny bit bigger! [Laughs along with congregation] Just a tiny bit bigger than the one I used to have, and so I don't think my pitching arm is quite good enough, unless it's going to be to you guys up here; maybe I could make it. So I've got the ushers who are going to help today give you gifts when you help me out by telling me who said the quote that I'm going to share. So that'll happen in a little bit; not quite yet.

First thing we're going to do is look at the first idea for: How do we find the gift in every moment, even when -- especially when -- it doesn't seem like a gift?

And the first way, coming out of this great book, is **DEVELOP YOUR "SYMBOLIC SIGHT."** Hmm. What is that? What is your symbolic sight?

Caroline Myss is the one who coined that term; she's quoted in this book. And this is what she said it is; this is how she defines it:

"To be willing to probe beneath the surface of the experience to see how it is woven into the tapestry of Divine Design."

Ahhh. Isn't that yummy? So yummy I think I have to say it again:

"To be willing to probe beneath the surface of the experience to see how it is woven into the tapestry of Divine Design."

That's what developing your symbolic sight means.

Jesus said it another way, but he said the exact same thing. He said, *"Judge ye not by appearances, but judge by righteous judgement."*

That's what he meant: Don't judge it by what the appearance is. See it higher. See it higher! Righteous judgement equals symbolic sight.

And if we can do that -- if we can develop that spiritual skill ... and it is a spiritual skill! This is spiritual work, my friends, to do this. If we can develop that spiritual skill, we will find the gift.

Now, it may not be instant. It may not be immediate. But if we're committed to finding it -- if we're committed to seeing through symbolic sight, we will find it. We absolutely will find it.

Okay. So here's your first chance to get a gift. Here's the first quote ... or the first quote of the gift-giving time. And it is:

"Everything has beauty, but not everyone sees it."

Isn't that good?

"Everything has beauty, but not everyone sees it."

Here are the clues. This was said by a single-named Chinese teacher and philosopher ...

[Congregant shouts, "Confucius!"] I didn't even get my ... I didn't even get it finished! Good job; good job, Rev. Sandy! Alright; hold your hand up. Where's an usher? Thank you! Delivered! Give her a hand; thank you, Rev. Sandy!

Here's the fascinating thing. Even if we don't see the beauty right away ... And who knows? Maybe we won't ever quite see the beauty in that particular situation. But if we are willing to see it -- if we are willing to open our eyes -- we expand who we are. We expand who we are as a God-being and we live a more expansive life. That is absolutely the way it works.

So here's another quote. Second chance; here we go!

"It is not what you look at that matters; it's what you see."

[Congregant shouts, "Wayne Dyer!"] I love it, but not right. [Congregation laughs] But I love Wayne Dyer as an answer. Go for it! Yeah; just shout 'em out!

[Another congregant shouts, "Louise Hays!"] Louise ... well, that's good, too; not it, either. So let me give you a clue. I love these possible answers, though!

A philosopher and an author who also said, *"Go confidently in the direction of your dreams. Live the life you have imagined."*

[Many congregants shout out] Yes! Thoreau!

And I heard two at exactly the same time, so we've got two. Because I think we have enough. Right here is one, usher; and where's the other one, behind you. Right there. Good; yes! Give them a hand. Good; yes! Excellent!

I want to share an example with you of someone who profoundly was able to develop her symbolic sight.

Many of you know that I just recently got back from a month-long trip to Peru. And I went with beloved Cerise Patron, who is an incredible singer. I'm pointing; she sings right over there a lot. She's not there at the moment, but she's often there. And she runs trips to Peru.

And so I went with her for a month, and helped with two back-to-back women's trips, and I provided some spiritual teachings and things. I've got a couple of my Peruvian friends sitting right up here in the front row. I love it!

And so there was one woman on our first trip; her name is Linda. Linda is a coaching client of mine; that's one of the things I do when I'm not standing up here is: I love mentoring and coaching people to help their best. And so I work with Linda on a regular basis. And when Linda heard about Peru she said, *"I'm in! I'm going! I've wanted to go all my life; I'm going."*

Now Linda is ... And Linda has given me permission to share this story, by the way. Actually was grateful -- was happy -- that I would share her experience in the hope that it might be valuable to someone else. Linda is in her early 70s ... not, by the way, that I think that is old, by any way, shape or form do I think that's old -- it's just a fact. [Laughs] Linda is in her early 70s, and she has MS. Linda has MS. And yet she was absolutely convinced that she could do this and it would not be a problem.

Well, it was a problem. She was very, very challenged with this trip. Physically challenged. The altitude ... because in Cusco, Peru, you're at 11,500 feet. That's high! The altitude got her. And all the hiking.

I say this trip is not for the faint of heart. If you want to go, talk to Cerise; it's amazing! There's Jill back there, too; another Peruvian girl! Yay! It's not for the faint of heart. You're traveling a lot. You're in and out of hotels a lot; you're in and out of airplanes. You're hiking Incan steps, which are little and rocky and uneven and up way high. It's not for the faint of heart.

So Linda struggled. And she did not get to do everything she wanted to do. She did not get to go to the top of Machu Picchu; she couldn't do it. She was frustrated; she was unhappy a lot of the time about the physical experience she was having.

So our trip completed. And she went home, and Cerise and I stayed. And a couple of days after the trip was over, Cerise and I get this email from Linda. And I want to share a few pieces out of it. Not the whole thing, but a few pieces. Because just listen to the development of her symbolic sight as she's writing this.

"I have not wanted to accept that I have MS and related health concerns and have continued to move through my life as if all is just fine. I have spent a lifetime being the caregiver: first for my family and then through my various vocations I've chosen along the way. I am one of the most resourceful people you will ever know but have had little regard for my own personal resources. All my life I have persevered through even the most difficult circumstances. It has always been so easy to teach others to help themselves, but my teaching fell short when it came to me. I save others, not myself.

"But our trip brought me face to face with my greatest fear: becoming unable to do all of the things I still want to do with my life. And I now know that it is not possible to do those things without stepping out of my dissociative shield. I knew the altitude and quick pace of the tour could be a problem, but I was sure I could overcome it as I always have. Facing my inability with our entire group was very difficult. I

And this is the sentence that just gets me!

"I had to allow a giant Peruvian boulder to break inside of me. When I didn't think I could take another step, or another breath, I had to allow myself to accept your loving help and care. You have helped me realize that it is much more important for me to accept love and help from those around me who are giving it from their whole hearts than it is to do it myself."

Thank you, Linda, for that email and for letting me share that. She had symbolic sight through a difficult, challenging situation. And she says -- not in the email, but in our conversation -- it was the most amazing trip she's ever taken. It is on the top of the list of things she's accomplished in her life. And it was transformative.

Symbolic sight: that's what it is.

So a question for you: How can you develop your symbolic sight so that you can begin to see the gifts that are in your experiences?

Question two: Is there a current life experience that you are having right now that you could use to call you up into a greater knowing of who and whose you are, and how you experience life?

Just a couple of questions for you to "noodle" on for a little while.

We're going to go to the second way, however, that you can help see the gifts, even when they're not obvious. And this is not an "or"; this is an "and."

BE A GIFT TO SOMEONE ELSE. Get out of your own [pause] horse manure, and see yourself be a gift to someone else.

Because -- here's another quote:

"You may be the only Bible somebody else reads."

You may be the only Bible somebody else reads! I love that quote so much, and it's from what I think is kind of an unlikely source. He's an American -- great American -- novelist and humorist who had a big bushy hair.

[Congregant yells, "Mark Twain!"] Mark Twain! In the back! You've got to give that woman a hand and some chocolate! Hold your hand up again; nicely done! Mark Twain said that; yes!

And here's another one that I just love:

"A single act of kindness throws out roots in all directions, and the roots spring up and make new trees."

The first female aviator to fly solo across the Atlantic Ocean. [Numerous congregants shout, "Amelia Earhart!"] Amelia ... Oh, boy; that was a ... Okay; right there! That was a lot in that area. Annie; you'll have to hold your hand up higher. Right there. Here it comes; perfect! Yay! Thank you; thank you!

So the question is that I want to pose briefly and unpack that a little bit is: So why is it ... Why is being a blessing; how does that expand us? How does that grow us? How does that help us find our own gifts? How does that work?

Well, guess what? I've got another quote! I have a couple more. Here's this one, and it's the answer to that, "Why is it so ...?" Here's the answer:

"The most important aspect of John 3:16 is 'for God so loved the world that he gave.'"

This quote -- which I love ... I was raised Baptist, by the way; I can quote my Bible! [Laughs]

"The more important aspect of John 3:16 is 'for God so loved the world that he gave.'"

He gave. He gave! [Continuing with the quote]:

"God is the divine givingness of the Universe."

Take that in for a second: God is the divine givingness of the Universe. [Continues reading quote]:

"And you -- you! -- are created in the image and likeness of this divine givingness."

Okay, that is a very famous Unity minister. Not one connected with this church, however, but a very famous Unity minister and author who wrote, among other things, *Spiritual Economics*.

[Many congregants shout out] Eric Butterworth! Right here in the very front row: Patricia! My Peruvian friend, Patricia. Are you out? You can't be out; here they come. Oh, no; we've got plenty! We've got plenty! Here it comes; yay!

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God is the divine givingness of the Universe! The givingness of the Divine is evident everywhere! All we have to do is open our eyes to see how Source/Spirit/life/energy -- whatever term you want to use if God is not a comfortable term for you. And if it's not, I suggest you get over that, but that's ...

[Congregation laughs] But that's an entirely other sermon. [Laughs] That's another sermon. But whatever term!



God is the givingness of life! And that can be seen everywhere. And in Peru ... I mean, you can see it everywhere! But when I was in Peru, I had such amazing opportunities to see the givingness of life. You're seeing right there [points to the big screen above her] the sun rise over Machu Picchu, and the ray of sun. And you might also be seeing a little interesting object in that, as well; we don't know what that little blue thing is! But you can see the sunray coming down over the mountain. That picture does not even begin to capture the moment when we saw the sun rise over that peak. It was unbelievable! And we were all standing there filled with the awesome givingness of the Divine.



Couple other things that I got to see that you're getting to see this morning, as well. And that is a sunrise over the Amazon River. [Sighs heavily in awe] Amazing!



Walking through flowers and bushes and trees and plants that I'd never seen before! That were so incredible. So amazing! And there is one tree that I don't have a picture of ... Because I couldn't capture the tree that I would really love to have you see. Because it was the most majestic thing I've ever seen; it's called a Ceiba Tree. C-E-I-B-A. Ceiba Tree.



And it was used as the model for the Tree of Souls in Avatar. And this tree: you walk upon it and your breath is taken away.



And another amazing and precious and glorious thing that we got to experience in Machu Picchu was having baby monkeys climb all over us and love on us. And drape themselves around us and pull our hair. And that's Cerise on that photo, for those of you who don't know who she is.

The amazing givingness of God was experienced again and again and again in Peru.

So we know that that's true. God is giving!

And the second piece of that quote from Eric Butterworth is that we are made in the image and likeness of that! And so we are givers! That's who we are; that's what we do! And when we're doing it, we are expressing our godliness in a high and holy way! We are expressing our divinity when we give.

So a way for you to find your own blessings is, in fact, to be a blessing for someone else.

So my question for you on this one is: What can you do today after service -- and then tomorrow and the next day and the next day -- to be a gift or a blessing to someone else?

I said earlier that the activity of developing our symbolic sight and now, also, being a blessing is our spiritual work. It's our spiritual work; it grows us in consciousness; in who we know ourselves to be.

So if you are having an experience right now that's challenging, and you've been wondering why the heck this is happening, it is here for your own spiritual growth.

And I've got one last quote. I'm hoping that one usher has more chocolate. Here's the quote:

"Life will give you whatever experience is most helpful for the evolution of your consciousness. How do you know this is the experience you need? Because this is the experience you are having at this moment."

Whew! Said by *New York Times* bestselling author, who wrote -- among other things -- *A New Earth*.

[Congregant yells out, "Eckhart Tolle."] Right there! Eckhart Tolle! Exactly!

So I ask you my three questions again as we bring our time to a close here:

Number one: How can you develop your symbolic sight so that you can see the gifts that are available in every experience?

Two: Is there a current experience you're having in your life right now that is calling you to expand who you know yourself to be and the life you are living?

And finally: What can you do today -- and tomorrow and the next day and the next day -- to make someone else's day?

When we do these things, we truly do see life through God's eyes. And we can deepen into our peace, purpose, love and joy, regardless of what's going on around us.

Namaste! Blessings!

[Congregation applauds and whoops]

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