

A hand reaching out from the right side of the frame, with the words "SENSING GOD" overlaid in white, bold, sans-serif capital letters. The background is black.

# SENSING GOD

## **GOING BEYOND THE SERMON LENT 2023 ENCOUNTERING GOD THROUGH THE SENSES**

**FEBRUARY 26 - SEE**  
JOHN 9:1-17, 35-41

**MARCH 5 - TASTE**  
LUKE 22:14-20 | PSALM 34

**MARCH 12 - TOUCH**  
MARK 5:25-34

**MARCH 19 - HEAR**  
PSALM 78:1-6

**MARCH 26 - SMELL**  
JOHN 12:1-8

**APRIL 2 (PALM SUNDAY) - PERCEIVE**  
ISAIAH 6:8-10

**DR. JOHN STEPHENS**

# Lent and Easter at Chapelwood

[www.chapelwood.org/lent](http://www.chapelwood.org/lent)

## Lenten Studies

### Sensing God: A Lenten Experience

Facilitated by Rev. Michael Sciretti, Rev. Rachel Sciretti, Peter Johns, and Teresa Rossy  
Wednesdays, March 1—April 5, 6:30 p.m., The Anchor House

### Men's Ministry Pauses for Lent Study

Facilitated by Chris Ferguson  
Wednesdays, March 1 —April 5, 7:30 p.m., Fireside Room

## Lenten Serving

Dedicate an Easter Lily  
Palm Sunday Book Drive  
Volunteer at the Easter Egg Hunt and Festival

## For Families with Children

Spring Break Egg Stuffing Service Project for Kids  
Easter Egg Hunt and Festival

## Holy Week

Palm Sunday Services  
Maundy Thursday Services  
Good Friday Services  
The Seven Last Words of Christ and Tenebrae  
Easter Egg Hunt and Festival  
Mercy Street Saturday Easter Worship

## Easter Sunday Worship Services

Sunrise Outdoor  
Contemporary  
Contemplative  
Acoustic  
Traditional  
Gessner Road: Fair Haven and Generaciones

*Sunday School for adults and children will not meet on Easter Sunday  
as we all celebrate in worship together as a church family.*

**BIBLE S.W.A.P.**

**S—Scripture: John 9:1-17, 35-41**

As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. 2 His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” 3 Jesus answered, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him. 4 We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work. 5 As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” 6 When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man’s eyes, 7 saying to him, “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam” (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. 8 The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, “Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?” 9 Some were saying, “It is he.” Others were saying, “No, but it is someone like him.” He kept saying, “I am he.”<sup>10</sup> But they kept asking him, “Then how were your eyes opened?”<sup>11</sup> He answered, “The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, ‘Go to Siloam and wash.’ Then I went and washed and received my sight.”<sup>12</sup> They said to him, “Where is he?” He said, “I do not know.”

13 They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. 14 Now it was a Sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. 15 Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, “He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see.” 16 Some of the Pharisees said, “This man is not from God, for he does not observe the Sabbath.” Others said, “How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?” And they were divided. 17 So they said again to the blind man, “What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened.” He said, “He is a prophet.”

<sup>35</sup> Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him he said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?”<sup>36</sup> He answered, “And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him.”<sup>37</sup> Jesus said to him, “You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he.”<sup>38</sup> He said, “Lord, I believe.” And he worshiped him.<sup>39</sup> Jesus said, “I came into this world for judgment, so that those who do not see may see and those who do see may become blind.”<sup>40</sup> Some of the Pharisees who were with him heard this and said to him, “Surely we are not blind, are we?”<sup>41</sup> Jesus said to them, “If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, ‘We see,’ your sin remains.

**Notes:**

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**W-What Does it Mean and What Can I Obey?**

Reread the Scripture and complete the following statements:

The disciples were focused on...

The neighbors were focused on ...

The Pharisees were focused on ...

The blind man was focused on ...

Jesus was focused on ...

Where are you in this story? What are you focused on?

In this story, Jesus challenges everyone's automatic ways of seeing the world. How does Jesus challenge you to change your focus of attention? What would it take to shift from living a life on automatic pilot to living a life awakened and aligned to God?

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## A-Apply

**Looking Inward.** In what ways am I blind? What are my blind spots? What is blocking the eye of my heart?

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**Taking Pictures.** Life behind the lens of a camera can actually help us see be open to the beauty all around us all the time in the ordinary things: the people with whom you share life, the sunlight as it shifts and changes throughout the day, your pet, your children, the full kitchen sink, the unmade bed, the budding leaves, the cardinal, or the butterfly. The possibilities of the ordinary things are positively endless. This week, keep your camera nearby at all times and when you see something that draws you in any way closer to God, take a photo. Make it your goal to capture one photo per day.

**Seeing Nature.** The earth's soil was the medium Jesus used to restore the man's sight. In your own lived experience, how has observing and being present in nature restored you and your spiritual sight? Take a moment to recall a time and relive that memory. How has that experience impacted you in the days, months, and years that followed? Plan a walk, a hike, or a sit in nature. Invite the Holy Spirit to use the sights around you to open your eyes to God's presence.

**Eyecare.** Clearly, Jesus cares about bodies, so as unspiritual as this might sound, take care of your eyes. Make that appointment for a new prescription. Schedule your cataract procedure. Clean your glasses! Take care of your contact lenses. Tend your eyes, the windows to your soul, as an act of holy love and obedience. And stick a note on your bathroom mirror as a reminder.

## P- Prayer

*In the morning light, O God,  
may I glimpse again your image deep within me,  
the threads of eternal glory woven  
into the fabric of every man and woman.  
Again may I catch sight of the mystery of the human soul  
fashioned in your likeness,  
deeper than knowing, more enduring than time.  
And in glimpsing these threads of light  
amidst the weakness and distortions of my life,  
let me be recalled to the strength and beauty deep in my soul.  
Let me be recalled to the strength and beauty of your image in every living soul.*

By J. Philip Newell, *Celtic Benediction*

**BIBLE S.W.A.P.**

**S—Scripture: Luke 22:14-20**

When the hour came, he took his place at the table, and the apostles with him. He said to them, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I tell you, I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he said, "Take this and divide it among yourselves; for I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." Then he took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." And he did the same with the cup after supper, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.

**Notes:**

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**W-What Does it Mean and What Can I Obey?**

Jewish life was punctuated with Feasts and Festivals. Familiar foods and rituals, gatherings and prayers, a yearly cyclical rhythm of fasting, feasting, repenting and celebrating. During the most sacred meal of the year; the Passover, Jesus overturns tradition. The symbols of slavery and freedom, sacrifice and liberation find new interpretation through his words, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." And he did the same with the cup after supper, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood." This departure from the familiar must have seemed shocking to the disciples. Their evening of traditional ritual breaks down into arguments over who would betray Jesus, and who seated at the table is the greatest disciple.

At the center of Christian Worship, we find not a song, or a prayer, but food. The consumption of bread and wine becomes an act of remembrance. Sight, smell, touch, and taste combine in a prayerful moment of reflection. The elements of communion combine with our bodies as this means of grace combines with our spirits. More than just a wafer and juice, every act of communion is the intersection of earth and heaven, a place of repentance, transformation, liberation, and celebration.

**A- Apply**

The Psalmist encourages us to "Taste and see that the Lord is good" in Psalm 34:8, but most of us prefer to see and then to taste. We want to know exactly what it is we are putting in our mouths *before* it hits our tastebuds. We have decided how we will respond to the taste before it passes our lips. I was once at lunch with a friend who I knew did not like anchovies. He ordered his regular Caesar salad and began to eat it. I asked him if he was aware that the dressing included the dreaded anchovy. Suddenly he could no longer eat the salad. The taste had not changed, but now he "saw" the salad differently.

How can you be open to tasting before seeing this week? Can you enter into experiences and suspend prejudgment?

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## GOING BEYOND THE SERMON

## SENSING GOD

*“No good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit; for each tree is known by its own fruit. Figs are not gathered from thorns, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush. The good person out of the good treasure of the heart produces good, and the evil person out of evil treasure produces evil; for it is out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaks. Luke 6: 43-45*

Let us not overlook good fruit just because its sight is unfamiliar — allow God to surprise you this week with new tastes.

### **P- Prayer**

God, help me be open to new tastes this week. To find joy in sweet, salt, sour, and bitter. To find you in all the flavors we encounter. To let all the experiences I savor help me to encounter your goodness. Help me cultivate good fruit in my life and in the life of others. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

## BIBLE S.W.A.P.

### S—Scripture: Mark 5:25-34

Now there was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years. She had endured much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse. She had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, for she said, "If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well." Immediately her hemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, "Who touched my clothes?" And his disciples said to him, "You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, 'Who touched me?'" He looked all around to see who had done it. But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth. He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease."

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### W-What Does it Mean and What Can I Obey?

This story is part of a longer story that is told in all three synoptic gospels. Jairus, a leader of one of the synagogues near the western shore of the Sea of Galilee, begged Jesus to come and heal his 12-year-old daughter who was near death. On his way there, the woman who had been bleeding for 12 years (the entirety of the little girl's life) strains against the crowd surrounding Jesus and reaches out in faith to touch Jesus' cloak – certain that this closeness to Jesus will heal her. And it does.

Her healing came at time when she surely had hit rock bottom – physicians had tried to help her, her money had run out, and instead of getting better, she had grown worse. In Jesus, she had seen renewal in Israel, other persons healed, and life-changing teaching. Her faith compels her to take the initiative to reach out and touch Jesus – crossing every cultural boundary. He immediately senses that "power had gone forth from him." He looks for her. The text does not say if Jesus touches her in return; just that she is healed. However, in the story that follows, Jesus takes the hand of Jairus' daughter, who is now dead. Jesus touches people that ritually pure Jews would avoid touching. His touch brings healing – just as the woman's faith expected.

### A- Apply

"There is something immediate, something startling in the effect of touch," writes Joel Clarkson in "Sensing God." "Like the other senses, it brings us into contact with the world around us, makes us aware of the bounding lines of the space of our lives. And yet, even more, it does something with none of the other senses can do: It brings us into direct contact with *each other*. Touch is the sacred bond that confirms, beyond any verbal expression or perceived action, that we are regarded by the other.

"It must either surrender to the full givenness of whatever act of contact is initiated, whether for good or ill, or it must withdraw back into itself." When the woman committed to reaching out for Jesus, there was no turning back – she has acted. We have language for this kind of action. We "go for it" or "reach out and touch" and conversely, we choose to be "hands off" or "wouldn't touch that with a 10-foot pole."

Humans need physical contact. We cannot live healthily without it. We also harm one another with physical touch. “How can we even begin to think of touch as a good thing when there is so much ambiguity before us?” asks Clarkson. “As always, the secret awaits us in the one who gave us our senses, and who, through His own life expressed the holy potency of touch as the *gift of self*.”

In Season 3 of *The Chosen* TV series, this encounter between Jesus and the woman with the issue of blood is vividly depicted. Search for this episode and watch it. Notice how the creators show the interaction between the two and with the crowd and the disciples. Keep watching as Jesus raises Jairus’ daughter.

Read the story of Jesus washing the disciples’ feet in John 13. As you sit with the story, hear these words of Jesus, “a new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.” Who in your life would be blessed by a compassionate, loving, serving touch from you? Plan to extend this act of kindness to that person during Lent.

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Read the story of Thomas touching the wound in the side of the resurrected Jesus in John 20. If possible, look online for an image of Caravaggio’s painting, *The Incredulity of Saint Thomas*. Notice the expressions on their faces, their closeness, and stance toward one. As Thomas touches Jesus, he becomes more deeply aware of himself. He learns that coming into contact with another person’s wounds is to commune with Christ. Is there someone in your life who needs you to come close and encounter their suffering?

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As you recall memories of being shown love or compassion through touch, thank God for the person who extended kindness to you.

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If your memories of touch are painful, ask God to overwhelm the sense of hurt with His provision of love. Consider sharing your story with someone trustworthy who can help you process that experience — perhaps a counselor, pastor, or other mental health professional.

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### **P-Pray**

“Let us touch the dying, the poor, the lonely and the unwanted according to the graces we have received and let us not be ashamed or slow to do the humble work.”

A Prayer of Mother Teresa

## BIBLE S.W.A.P.

### S—Scripture: Psalm 78:1-6

Give ear, O my people, to my teaching;  
incline your ears to the words of my mouth.  
I will open my mouth in a parable;  
I will utter dark sayings from of old,  
things that we have heard and known,  
that our ancestors have told us.

We will not hide them from their children;  
we will tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the Lord,  
and his might, and the wonders that he has done.

He established a decree in Jacob,  
and appointed a law in Israel,  
which he commanded our ancestors to teach to their children;  
that the next generation might know them,  
the children yet unborn,  
and rise up and tell them to their children.

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## W-What Does it Mean and What Can I Obey?

There is *passive hearing* and then there is *attentive listening*. In this Psalm, we are exhorted to move from the former to the latter. In *passive hearing* we are not really open to being changed by what we are hearing. To move into the first stage of *attentive listening* we need to have an “open mind.” It’s as if we need to hear something again. “What did you say,” we might ask. “I’m not sure if I heard you.” We might even cup our ear, to “give our ear,” so that we can hear better. There is a desire to want to know, to be curious. No true learning can take place unless we start with an open mind.

Yet the kind of *attentive listening* the Psalmist calls for goes even a bit deeper, calling for an “open heart.” The Psalmist is proclaiming the “glorious deeds” of the Lord. Not just telling information or facts, but recounting stories of God’s love and power that are glorious, that move and awe the heart. With an open mind and open heart, we are moved to wonder.

Yet there is even one more level of *attentive listening*. The deepest level calls for an “open will,” a willingness to have listened so deeply that one is moved to respond. In this Psalm, the listener is exhorted to respond by moving from *listening* to *telling*. This also requires intentionality, to be so open of mind, heart and will that one can be creative in *telling* of the “glorious deeds of the Lord” and making them truly *known*.

## A-Apply

Most of us need to work at our listening skills. Instead of listening to what others are saying, we are busy thinking about what we are going to say next. Instead of listening to our bodies, we find ways to abuse them. Instead of listening to the world around us, we are too busy using it.

What if God is always speaking to us – through others, our bodies, and nature – but we are only passively hearing and not attentively listening?

This week, aim to listen with an “open mind” and an “open heart.” Following are some suggestions for expanding this practice:

When talking to a person, you can ask more generative questions (open mind) and listen for the meaning of what they are saying (open heart).

You could also listen to your body by paying attention to how you are feeling and inquiring about why you’re feeling the way you are. For example, if you are tired, why might that be (open mind) and how does it make you feel (open heart)?

You might take a walk in nature and, instead of being lost in your own thoughts, listen more closely to the sounds around you (open mind) and be attentive to what feelings arise within you (open heart), such as wonder, gratitude, peace, etc. With an open mind and heart, we become more attentive to the many ways God speaks.

Finally, cultivate an “open will” by simply asking God what God would have you do in light of what you have heard or sensed from God.

Reflections from the practice:

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## P-Pray

That truth has been inscribed into my heart  
and into the heart of every human being,  
there to be read and revered,  
thanks be to you, O God.

That there are ways of listening  
and sensitivities of knowing  
hidden deep in the palace of the soul,  
waiting to be discovered,  
ready to be set free,  
thanks be to you.

Open my senses to wisdom’s inner promptings  
that I may give voice to what I hear in my soul  
and be changed for the healing of the world,  
that I may listen for truth in every living soul  
and be changed for the healing of the world.

J. Philip Newell, *Sounds of the Eternal*

## BIBLE S.W.A.P.

### S—Scripture: John 12:1-8

Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him. Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, "Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?" (He said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.) Jesus said, "Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me."

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### W-What Does it Mean and What Can I Obey?

Nard is a scented ointment or perfume imported from the Himalayas in alabaster boxes and opened on special occasions. In the Song of Solomon, it is used by a woman to enhance her sexual appeal and, indeed, appears to be employed during the act of lovemaking (1:12, 4:13,14). In the New Testament, a woman (unnamed in Mark 14:3-5, but identified as Mary of Bethany in John 12:3-5) breaks open an alabaster jar of nard and pours the ointment on Jesus. The cost of the ointment is estimated at about 300 denarii, or a year's wages. (Harper Collins Bible Dictionary)

When Judas complains about the cost of the perfume and its use for anointing his feet, Jesus tells Judas to "leave Mary alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial." In this extreme act of hospitality, Mary welcomed Jesus into her home and gave him a scented preview of what the day of his burial would be like. On that day, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus brought a "mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing about a hundred pounds. They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths, according to the burial custom of the Jews." (John 20:38-41)

Mary is remembered in Scripture for this act. Read John 11:2, which occurs before she anoints Jesus: "Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill." Later in John 13:5, the same word "wipe" (ekmassō) is used when Jesus washes the disciples' feet at the Last Supper. He tells his disciples to do the same for others. "She does it before Jesus even teaches it!" writes Jaime Clark-Soles in "Reading John for Dear Life" p. 82.

### A-Apply

Science proves that smell is the sense most closely associated to memory. Harvard's Venkatesh Murthy explains that the two are so closely linked because of the brain's anatomy. "Smells are handled by the olfactory bulb, the structure in the front of the brain that sends information to the other areas of the body's central command for further processing. Odors take a direct route to the limbic system, including the amygdala and the hippocampus, the regions related to emotion and memory. 'The olfactory signals very quickly get to the limbic system,' Murthy said.

Speaking in the same panel discussion, Dawn Goldworm, co-founder of olfactive branding company 12.29, explained that smell is the only fully developed sense a fetus has in the womb, and it's the one that is the most developed in a child through the age of

around 10 when sight takes over. And because “smell and emotion are stored as one memory,” said Goldworm, childhood tends to be the period in which you create “the basis for smells you will like and hate for the rest of your life.” (From The Harvard Gazette, “What the Nose Knows” by Colleen Walsh, February 27, 2020.) <https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2020/02/how-scent-emotion-and-memory-are-intertwined-and-exploited/>

We are taught to picture the scenes from Jesus’s life, but rarely are we invited to imagine what they smelled like. This Bible story tells us that the home of Lazarus, Mary, and Martha was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. The smell of the nard evoked a strong reaction from Judas as well. Based on what we know about smell and memory, we wonder why Judas went one “place” when he smelled the costly perfume and Jesus and Mary went another “place.” According to Clark-Soles, “This act of hospitality costs Mary dearly, yet she doesn’t count the cost; it costs Judas nothing, yet he’s all noisy concern.” (p. 83)

The burial passage from John 20 invites us to smell the tomb – imagining in a new way what a hundred pounds of spices would do to soothe the stench of Jesus’ tortured dead body.

Also, imagine that Jesus might have strong memories associated with smells of both hospitality and burial from other times he spent in Lazarus’ home. Martha is portrayed in Luke 10 and John 12 as a homemaker whose many tasks – most likely cooking and cleaning – would have produced delightful smells. The whole family has consistently and generously provided for Jesus during his ministry. And, Lazarus died at home. It was there that Jesus wept. It was from his nearby tomb that Jesus raised him from the dead.

Goldworm suggests “paying attention with your nose. When you are walking down the street, consciously indicate what you are smelling ... the more you use [your nose], the stronger it gets.” This week, allow your sense of smell to lead you to enjoying the world around you.

Are there certain smells that evoke memories for you?

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If these memories remind you of times that you have experienced love, peace, joy, acceptance, or kindness – thank God for the associated people and situations in your life.

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If these memories are painful, are you able to offer them to God in prayer and receive healing, grace, and freedom that Jesus offers you?

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### **P- Prayer**

God, you created the world and all the wonderful fragrances we find in nature. You give us creativity to make foods and perfumes that lead us to feast together and enjoy being close. Be with us when smells evoke painful memories. Help us to remember the devotion of Mary whose love for Jesus “filled the whole house with its fragrance.” Amen

**BIBLE S.W.A.P.**

**S—Scripture: Isaiah 6:8-10**

Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?”

And I said, “Here am I; send me!” And he said, “Go and say to this people:

‘Keep listening, but do not understand;  
keep looking, but do not perceive.’  
Make the heart of this people dull,  
and stop their ears,  
and shut their eyes,  
so that they may not look with their eyes  
and listen with their ears  
and understand with their hearts  
and turn and be healed.”

**Notes:**

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**W-What Does it Mean and What Can I Obey?**

Immediately before our scripture passage, we read that the prophet Isaiah had just had a multi-sensory experience of the LORD’s presence. He *saw* the LORD’s presence filling the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem. He *heard* the angels praising and proclaiming that the LORD’s sacred presence fills all of creation. He *felt* the building shaking. He *smelled* the smoke that was filling the Temple. He *tasted* the coal that the angel had placed on his lips, symbolizing that Isaiah had been purified of his own sin.

But then we read that Isaiah is to go and proclaim a difficult message to the people. Although at first it sounds like a fatalistic condemnation, in reality it is a message that gives us the ultimate means for perceiving God. And that is the organ of the *heart*, which is ultimately an organ of *perception*. Ultimately, our senses can be ways we cultivate a discerning, perceptive heart. As we turn our attention and descend into an open and softened heart, something supernatural happens: seeing becomes *beholding*, tasting becomes *savoring*, touching becomes *blessing*, hearing becomes *listening*, and smelling becomes *recognizing*. Through the spiritual heart, we are able to truly perceive and discern the sacred presence in the temple – the temple of our being, of our body, or our world, or our universe.

**A-Apply**

Bro. David Steindl-Rast says, “The visible and the invisible meet at the crossroads which we call our heart. When we say ‘heart,’ we mean that center of our personal being where we are one with ourselves; yet, not with ourselves only. In our heart of hearts we are one also with all others – and with the Ultimate, with God.” But he goes on to say, “How much of the splendor of life is wasted on us because we plod along half-blind, half-deaf, with all our senses throttled, and numbed by habituation. How much joy is lost on us. How many surprises we miss.” The problem seems to be that we do not return to our heart and seek to live and perceive from there. But this does not come naturally to most of us. We need practices to help support us.

## GOING BEYOND THE SERMON

## SENSING GOD

This week, aim to descend into your heart and seek to perceive God's presence from that place within you. You can do this anywhere and everywhere. But two classic times are (1) early in the morning before you begin your day and (2) at night before you go to sleep.

To begin, you could use one ancient spiritual practice: **Breath Prayer**

Simply close your eyes and follow your breath down into the region of your heart. You then add a short prayer in rhythm with your breath, such as: "With an open heart" (as you inhale) and "I perceive Your Presence" (as you exhale).

"With an open heart ... I perceive Your Presence."

After you use this breath prayer for a few moments, you might use another classic spiritual practice: **The Examen**

In this practice you simply ask yourself when you sensed God's presence or what gave you life and energy that day. You can follow up with asking yourself when you felt far away from God's presence or what drained you of life and energy.

Or, to use the language from Isaiah, when your mind or heart was "dull" and you missed perceiving a deeper meaning or possibility of an event of your past day. Even times of failure to discern God's presence can be instructive, helping you to course correct and encouraging you to return to God in your heart. Then you can recommit yourself to becoming more deeply aware of God's presence – within you, with you, and all around you.

Reflections from the practices:

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### P-Pray

*In the temple of my inner being,  
in the temple of my body,  
in the temple of earth, sea and sky,  
in the great temple of the universe  
I look for the light that was in the beginning,  
the mighty fire that blazes still from the heart of life,  
glowing in the whiteness of the moon,  
glistening in night stars,  
hidden in the black earth,  
concealed in unknown depths of our soul.  
In the darkness of the night,  
in the shadows of my being, O God,  
let me perceive the eternal.  
In both the light and the shadow of my being  
let me perceive the glow of the eternal.*

J. Philip Newell, *Sounds of the Eternal* (adapted)



## ***Get Going Beyond the Sermon in Your Inbox***

*Sermon notes written by Teresa Rossy, Director of Adult Discipleship Ministries,  
Chapelwood United Methodist Church in Houston, Texas.*

*Source material is quoted throughout. The sermons are streamed online and worship is in person at 8:30,  
9:45, and 11:15 a.m. in the Sanctuary of our Greenbay campus. Go to [www.chapelwood.org](http://www.chapelwood.org) for details.*

*To get Going Beyond the Sermon in your inbox, e-mail Laura Frost, [lfrost@chapelwood.org](mailto:lfrost@chapelwood.org).*



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