

Scripture Reading: Psalm 13 and Acts 9: 1-20

## **Seeing God through New Eyes**

Good morning. My name is Kitty Hudson Cawley. I'm a member of this congregation and I am grateful to be a guest in this pulpit today, on the Sunday before Earth Day. Please pray with me...May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer.

[SLIDE: Open Hearts] The Davis United Methodist Church keeps this phrase front and center: "Open hearts, open minds, open doors." It is hard to do...but we give it our best shot, because we are passionate about being an inclusive community. I have a diagram I want to show you that focuses on hearts and how we each open ourselves to God.

[SLIDE: Diagram] The image has two axes. The Mind-Heart axis focuses on our relationship with God...how we communicate most easily with God. For some it is mainly through their intellect and reasoning; for others it is through their heart and their feelings. This axis is about how we tune in to God or Jesus or the Spirit in our lives. At any time we can be anywhere along the axis, but each of us also has a natural comfort zone.

The horizontal axis is the Mystery-Revelation axis. It's about how people tend to believe God works in the world. For those who see with the eyes of Mystery, God's actions are beyond our understanding. Poetry is the language of the mystics. When you think "Mystery", think of Jesus saying, "I am the light of the world."

The other end of this axis represents those who see God with the eyes of Revelation...they are clear that God works in the world through kind, generous, courageous acts done by people. It is God dwelling in each of us, using our hands to do the work of God on this earth. Think of Jesus again, and how he said, "feed the hungry, clothe the naked, heal the sick, visit the prisoners."

[POINTER] ... I'm usually right about here... I hear and respond to God most easily through my heart and feelings, and I believe God works in ways far beyond my understanding, but I also believe God uses my hands to do some of the work. If we had time this morning, we could explore where others in this sanctuary believe they would fall in this sphere. I think it would make an interesting scatter gram and tell an interesting story about us.

[SLIDE – blank] Since I'm an unknown quantity for some here today, I'd like to give you a little context and share something about my life as it is right now. One of the big things I live with is that my husband Mike was diagnosed with dementia four years ago. The Big Impact of this diagnosis has been on Mike, but as his primary caregiver, I also have been affected by it. It is my experience that I will speak of today.

I consider myself a fortunate woman. I have a deep, rich relationship with God. I have generous and faithful family and friends. I've got an interesting job that lets me do my best to accomplish things I am passionate about...to make a difference. My job is part time, so I can usually leave work around mid-afternoon and I can flex my schedule when Mike and I need to take care of health appointments.

On another level, I also consider myself fortunate that I am an optimist. I love the idea of potential...our potential as clay in God's good hands, our potential to make God's kingdom more and more visible on this earth. I believe with my entire soul that God wants to be known. And I believe God is passionate enough about each one of us to go to extremes to help us know and experience for ourselves God's love.

For example, I think this morning's scripture from Acts shows God's willingness to go to extremes to get someone's attention...

[SLIDE -Saul]

For all the love and commitment Saul had in his heart toward God, God knew, as Saul stormed down that road to Damascus, that Saul had God in a box. Saul's eyes were not able to see that God was actually doing something Very New in the world at that very point in history. The Creator God, who knows us better than we know

ourselves, also knew that Saul had what it was going to take to move the newborn church forward through that time in history. For God's own purpose, God really needed Saul's attention. So, God did what it took to get his attention and, as we read in the story, God helped him to see through new eyes.

[SLIDE – blank] The story I want to tell you today is nowhere as extreme as Saul's. I don't know what God has in mind for me as my life plays out at this time in history. But I do know God got my attention in a new way last year in October. In October it dawned on me that I had been living a fairly painful life in the years since my husband's diagnosis, and I needed God pretty badly. While I actively focused on my blessings, like the peace in our home and the simple routine we followed each day, somehow the four-year mark got under my skin. I became increasing aware that the mantle on my shoulders was heavy, getting heavier, and didn't appear that it would be lifting for a long time.

I became excruciatingly clear and overwhelmingly sad – I know this is harsh, given that I am not the one with the disease – that my life had been put on hold. I lost hope that my life mattered for anything in the scheme of things. Psalm 13 was my prayer.

How long, O Lord?

Will you forget me forever?

How long will you hide your face from me?

In early November God responded to me. (And I do know I'm going out on a limb here, saying I think God was talking to me, but I feel it's important to tell you the real story.) I was driving from Sacramento to Davis across the causeway, the same road I'd traveled for 37 years since coming to UCD as a freshman. As usual, cars were flying along beside me. I glanced over and noticed the wetlands to my left. As usual, I pulled my eyes back to the road. But on this trip across the causeway a tug of war started: road...wetlands...road ...wetlands...road. I started asking myself, "What is OUT there?" I was headed home. I had lots of things to do, but my wondering took over. I neared the end of the causeway, moved into the right lane and pulled off at the exit. [SLIDES – exit, underpass...through to Parking Lot B] It looked like this...the underpass, the Yolo Wildlife Area sign, the turnoff and

its signs, swooshing down into the wetlands, and following sign after sign as I guessed which way to go. [Hold on Parking Lot B]

When I ended up in Parking Lot B, I sat there in my car looking around me with the windows up...then I rolled the windows down. I got to thinking that if I really wanted to experience this place, it wasn't enough just to roll the windows down. I needed to get out of the car. [SLIDE – road] As I climbed out, I noticed that the buzz of the causeway was gone. The road was just over there a little ways, but I couldn't even hear it. Instead there was something like a pulse from the water and the breeze and the sun and the light – all interacting and creating this alive, connected feeling. It was full of peace and vibrancy. I turned around 360 degrees – literally. [SLIDE - Sacramento] Sacramento was to the east, [SLIDE] Diablo out there somewhere to the south, [SLIDE] the coastal range to the west and [SLIDE - grasses] the causeway to the north...in the distance...with cars and trucks moving across it...an Amtrak train headed toward Sacramento. This felt like another world. [SLIDE] Being there, I felt light and hopeful and so amazed...this had been in sight, but completely separate from my life even as I drove by it for all of those 37 years. As I stood there that day in October, I felt my world expanding. I had a very clear sense that God was pleased that I had followed that voice in my head...OR was it a voice in my heart?

Please remember, I had become quite overwhelmed by my situation at home with the lack of control in my life and the loss of hope. [SLIDE – birds] It felt wonderful to experience this new place, full of beauty and vitality. I was so hungry for the lightness I felt out there that I didn't just go out to the wetlands that one day, I went out several times in November...with Mike a few times and once with a buddy who, like me, enjoys discovery.

[SLIDE – canal] My friend hadn't ever explored the wetlands either, but she was knowledgeable about the Yolo Basin group that was leading collaborative efforts intent on restoring the wetlands. They had worked since 1990 to re-establish a flyway for migratory birds. [SLIDE – towering cloud] I know from my job how hard it is to get people to work well together, and in this case it meant folks like hunters and environmentalists finding common ground. [SLIDE – get away birds] The story behind this place is powerful. These people have been doing the heavy

lifting of environmental restoration for over 20 years. These dedicated, future-thinking people have made a place where creation is honored. [SLIDE – egret] The wetlands are an extraordinary accomplishment on many levels. [SLIDE – trees in water]

The end of November was filled with turbulent storms. [SLIDE – shaft of light] On November 30<sup>th</sup>, a Friday afternoon at 3 pm, there was a break in the storm system. I left work and drove east along the frontage road with my digital camera, intent on capturing images of God in the wetlands. [SLIDE – green shore] God met me...alive in the waving grasses, in the gusting wind, in the magical light, in the clouds that danced across the sky. I had an amazing photo shoot. It was absolute, total fun.

When I downloaded the images to my computer, there were dozens of shots from so many angles, [SLIDE – dark shadows] so many directions...alive...so much life. I was delighted. I turned the images into note cards [SLIDE – lone duck] and gave them as Christmas presents from my heart. It felt like the gift I was giving were my own glimpses of God [SLIDE – light reflection], not that I mentioned that to anyone.

Christmas came and went, as it usually does. I continued to go on photo shoots out on the wetlands. [SLIDE – wispy clouds, Sierras, west & ducks, sunrise, hawk, water] But, as is true for most of life's exciting moments, my daily routine returned.

[SLIDE – blank]

Every day I still serve my loving husband to the best of my ability. I also continue to take care of myself, being especially careful when I begin to feel sad. What I **do to take care of myself** comes from that experience of seeing God on the wetlands. I pay attention to all sorts of places and people and things that I feel connected to. There's something about feeling a connection that makes me feel alive...and I really need to feel alive now.

Here are some examples of what I mean:

1. [SLIDE – oak] This oak stands in east Davis at Korematsu Elementary school. Imagine standing under this tree, with its roots spreading beneath you...the trunk thick and strong ...[SLIDE – sunspot] the limbs lifting to the sky.
2. [SLIDE – Jones' home] Sometimes when I drive home, I choose to drive by Estelle and John Jones' house...the colors absolutely make me feel alive.
3. [SLIDE – Eleanor Roosevelt] Or there's Eleanor Roosevelt Circle in east Davis... I think of Bill Powell when I drive by it, because he helped get it built. In 2005 it was an empty, weed-filled lot, now it's low income housing for senior citizens.
4. [SLIDE – R&R] When I drive past All Things Right and Relevant, I think of Rosa and the way she commits some of her time to help this Earth-friendly organization, which gives our community a place to share reusable clothing.
5. [SLIDE – Jim Cramer] I also think of other people who give us opportunities to connect with the earth and each other, like Jim Cramer when he leads his annual wildflower walks.
6. [SLIDE – quilt] Others express God's character in their art; like my mom has done in this quilt she just finished...she loves to create complicated, beautiful things...just like God does.
7. [SLIDE – smile] And then, there's a friend who sent me this picture, saying that it always makes her smile – when I see it, I remember her and that makes me smile. [STAY on SLIDE]

These are examples of the kind of things I tune into as I drive around town, or when I think of people I know. They make me turn my eyes toward God and say thanks. I don't mean to be a Pollyanna. I know there is a lot of ugly stuff in the world. But for me, at this time in my life, I have been given permission to look around for the good stuff in order to keep my personal darkness at bay. It is seeing the good that feeds my soul.

I'd like to finish my talk by sharing a slide show with you...it is set to music and has all sorts of images of where I see God. While I took many of the pictures in the

show, others were generously shared with me by Kathy Schinski, Susan Padgett, Bill Powell, and Janice Morand. [SLIDE – lyrics] The music that goes with the slides is a song called “Open the Eyes of My Heart.”

Open the eyes of my heart, Lord.  
I want to see you...  
see you high and lifted up,  
shining in the light of your glory.  
Pour out your power and love,  
as we sing, “Holy, holy, holy.”

From me to you, “Seeing God through New Eyes.”