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September 30, 2007

Amos 6:1-7

1 Timothy 6:11-19

Luke 16:19-31

A few weeks ago, I was late for a meeting on the south side of Grand Rapids. Since I was late, I was getting pretty impatient. I headed down the Beltline and, as always, whenever I am late, I find myself stuck in traffic behind a construction vehicle of some sort. Why does it always happen like this? To top it off, I swear, the construction vehicle in front of me began to slow down almost as soon as I got behind it. I put up with this for about 15 seconds, seemed like hours, and then I said to myself, "I have had it." I pulled out to pass.

Immediately I heard a screech of tires, and the blaring of a car horn.

I swerved back into my lane before I caused an accident that would have most certainly resulted in serious injury.

In my frustration, I had not noticed the car in the passing lane. Thank goodness, the driver noticed me. Just try to imagine, try to ponder how many things we do not notice every day. Most accidents are caused by those things we do not notice. We do not notice the shoes on the steps, the car on the side of the road, the water on the floor, the ice in the parking lot. We do not notice that more and more sarcasm is creeping into our conversation. We do not notice the pain in our arm, the flutter in our chest. We do not notice the sad looking face of a loved one, when we are not able to give them time that they need or want.

How often we put ourselves at risk of accident because of some things we fail to notice?

Just imagine also how much more rich life could be if we did take more time to really notice life around us?

How much of life today have you already failed to notice?

- Did you miss the glorious sun rise, or the colors of leaves changing.
- Did you fail to notice your breakfast as you ate this morning?
- Did you notice the wonders of creation this morning: the birds singing, the wind against your face, the smells of autumn?
- Did you notice the greetings your loved ones gave you as you or they awoke?

Sometimes we miss the best of life simply because we fail to notice.

Of course there are reasons we miss so much. We are pre-occupied with stresses and problems at work or home, in our life or the lives of those we love. We have so much on our plates. So much to do and so little time. Our gadgets sometimes prevent us from noticing life. Our cell phones, ipods, computers, and televisions so bombard us with noise and information that we do not notice those who are sitting across the room from us. We do not notice all that we have because we are so focused on that which we do not have. Our lives are filled with so much stuff; so much food, so much drink, so much comfort, we do not notice those who go without. There are many reasons we do not notice life as we pass through it.

Our readings this weekend are about "noticing" or rather, "not noticing".

Amos speaks against the leaders of Israel because they do not notice the plight of the poor. They lie on beds of ivory, eat lambs and calves from the flock, dress in luxury, drink from bowls, and listen to finest music, yet are not grieved by the ruin of Joseph. Because of this, because they have not noticed the misery of the poor, they will be first to go into exile. It was not for their riches, it was not their luxury that angered the Lord. Israel angered the Lord, because they did not notice the poor in their midst. For not noticing, Amos charges, they will be punished.

In the Gospel, the rich man did not notice Lazarus. He dresses in purple and fine linen. He feasts sumptuously. He

does not notice Lazarus longing for the scraps from his table, or the dogs licking his sores. The rich man does not notice Lazarus until he needs him. "Abraham, send Lazarus to dip his finger in water and cool my tongue. Send him to my brothers. Surely they will notice him."

The rich man does not notice the chasm between he and Lazarus. The rich man has built this chasm by not noticing Lazarus. He built the chasm with the tools of indifference.

Speaking of noticing, did you happen to notice, that the rich man does not have a name, while Lazarus does. This is a theme always present in the Gospel of Luke. In the Kingdom of God, all is reversed, all is turned upside down. The nameless ones are named and the rich and powerful are nameless. The proud are cast down, and the lowly lifted up. The hungry are filled, and the rich are sent empty away.

Notice throughout the Gospel of Luke the radical reversal of fortune that turns the values of this world upside down.

If noticing is important, how can we begin to do so?

Paul gives us some clues in his letter to Timothy. Paul urges generosity. One who is generous, notices. When you are generous with your riches, you notice those who are in need. When you are generous with your time, you notice those who need your assistance. When you have a generous heart and make space in your heart and show hospitality to the stranger, you will notice the presence of God in their life. Generosity is a gift which allows us to notice.

Prayer helps us to notice. You cannot pray the scripture without noticing the poor. You cannot pray sincerely without noticing your sin, and your brokenness. You cannot pray sincerely without noticing the love which God has for you. You cannot pray sincerely without finding hope, without discovering courage, without growing in compassion. The more we pray, the more we notice.

Our study of Philip Yancey's book prayer and our group spiritual direction meetings are about learning to notice the presence and the actions of God in our life.

So, we give thanks for our minds that think, our eyes that see, noses that smell, tongues that taste, fingers that touch, ears that hear.

- May our senses help us to notice more in life.
- May we notice the poor, and give thanks that Christ is present in them.
- May we notice that poor and see in them the coming of the kingdom of God.
- May we notice those around us, our friends and loved ones. Those who know us so well, and love us nonetheless.
- May we notice ourselves, where we are broken and whole, success or failures.
- May we notice those parts of our life that make us proud, as well as those things that cause us shame.
- May we notice our whole true self, and when we notice our full self, may we notice the love God has for us.
- May we notice creation, the colors, the smells, the sights the sounds.
- May we notice the food we taste, the water we drink and the air we breathe.

And, dear friends, when we notice all these blessings in our life, may we notice and give thanks. Thanks be to our God who has blessed us so extravagantly, our God who has showered us abundantly with blessings and gifts.