

October 8, 2026



PASTORAL MEDITATION by Rev. Thomas Hawkins

THE GLORY OF GOD IS A PERSON FULLY ALIVE

I spent most of my recent vacation in the French city of Lyon. Founded in 43 BCE as the capital of Roman Gaul, it was one of the earliest centers of Christianity in western Europe. Traders and merchants from Smyrna and other cities in Asia Minor settled in Lyon and brought their Christianity with them during the late first and early second century. We know this date because a 2nd-century CE preserved by the 4th-century church historian Eusebius describes how in 177 the church suffered severe persecution under Emperor Marcus Aurelius.

Following this persecution, an early missionary and theologian named Irenaeus arrived in Lyon and became bishop of Lyon. His book *Against the Heresies* remains a valuable resource for church historians and theologians. In it he discusses many of the 2nd century's theological controversies and articulates a vision of Christian faith that he claimed he learned from Bishop Polycarp of Smyrna who claimed his teachings were personally given to him by John the Evangelist, the apostle credited with writing the fourth gospel. One particular sentence from Irenaeus' *Against the Heresies* is still widely quoted: "The glory of God is a human being fully alive; and human life consists in beholding God."

Even if you have no interest in some obscure 2nd-century bishop, this sentence written 1,800 years ago ought to inspire reflection. What does it mean for us to be "fully alive?" And how can "being fully alive" depend upon our willingness or capacity to "behold God?"

Lots of ink has been spilled over this sentence across the centuries. In recent years, we've read Irenaeus' sentence through the lens of our contemporary culture that interprets aliveness as being happy and self-satisfied with "doing our own thing." To be fully alive is to have a triumphant adrenaline rush over our latest achievement. Clearly this is not what Irenaeus meant by "being fully alive," however.

The clue to Irenaeus' meaning is his linking of "being fully human" with "beholding God." Anglican spiritual writer Maggie Ross observes that in the Bible "behold is a word that alerts us to pause, however briefly, to be vigilant, because something new, something startling, is about to be revealed." To behold is to wake up. As Ephesians 5:14 puts it, "Sleeper, awake! Rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you." To behold is to pause and notice God at work in each day's smallest, most ordinary happenings or encounters and thus illumine for us how God's glory is all around us.

The word "Behold!" occurs more than 1,500 times in the Bible. Gabriel says to Mary, "Behold! I bring you news of great joy." John the Baptizer tells his disciples, "Behold! The lamb of God." The prophet Isaiah announces to weary exiles, "Behold, God is doing a new thing." A life that glorifies God begins with our "beholding." According to Franciscan priest Richard Rohr, beholding happens when we stop trying to 'hold' and allow ourselves to 'be held' by something beyond ourselves. We are completely enchanted by something outside and beyond ourselves... it becomes an epiphany and the walls of your world begin to expand." Or as poet William Cowper puts it in his 18th-century hymn: Sometimes a light surprises us, which is the Lord who rises with healing in his wings.

Yesterday I walked out onto our driveway and just beyond the garage door I saw a single leaf lying where the wind had blown it free from a nearby maple tree. Once green, it was now a brilliant red and veined with gold. Soon, I knew, its colors would fade and the wind would blow it away. Resting there on an asphalt driveway made of crushed stone and bitumen, this solitary leaf startled me into beholding the promise of beauty that can be found amid even dark moments and changing times. In that leaf, God was pleading with me to "behold" the wonderful works of the Lord (Job 37:14) so that I might live more fully not just in that moment but in every moment of the day.

"The glory of God is a human being fully alive; and human life consists in beholding God."

I invite us to take time to pause and be attentive to where God's constant beauty, grace, and mercy are showing up more clearly for us. As we learn to release ourselves from the tyranny of self-absorption, our awareness begins to

expand. We notice more frequently where and how God is showing up in our lives, and therefore how God wants us to show up in and for the world.

After all, if the Good Book tells us nearly 1,500 times to “behold” and pay attention to how there is glory all around us, then it’s more than a casual suggestion on how we are to go through our days and years.

May God be with you always and in all ways,
Pastor Thomas

SUNDAY WORSHIP in the sanctuary or livestream link: <http://www.facebook.com/churchontherotary/>

MODERATOR’S NOTE

Greetings! As we enter deeper into the Fall season, I wanted to share a few important updates:

Parking & Traffic Flow Updates

- Lower Back Lot: The parking lines have been repainted, and a third handicap-accessible space has been added.
- Front Driveway (Fire Lane): We added a "No Parking Fire Lane" designation on the church curbside in consultation with the ELFD. This ensures emergency vehicles have clear access if needed. Please help spread the word that parking here is prohibited. For fairs and events, vendors may temporarily pull up to unload but must immediately move their vehicles afterward.
- Front Driveway (Angled Parking): We are adding angled parking to the rotary side of the front driveway, which increases available spots and eliminates parallel parking. Directional arrows will direct traffic to enter from Prospect Street and exit onto Somers Road. Hartline Painting will complete these lines shortly if they have not done so already.

Front Steps Evaluation

We have hired a structural engineering firm to assess our front steps and recommend repairs, as they are currently pulling away from the 175-year-old foundation. While the steps remain safe for emergency egress from the sanctuary, please do not use them to enter the building. We will share updates as this project progresses.

Safety & Security Assessment

Church leadership and the Business and Finance Board are currently reviewing the safety and security evaluation report from our assessors. We are prioritizing recommendations to begin upgrading our physical infrastructure and operational processes. We also plan to leverage available grant funding for many of these projects in the coming months.

Craft Fair Parking

Please stay tuned for updates regarding parking for the Annual Craft Fair. St. Mike's informed us that we cannot use their lot this year due to a scheduling conflict on their end. We are actively pursuing an alternative parking plan and will update everyone as soon as details are finalized.

Enjoy this wonderful Fall season!

ADULT BOOK STUDY

The second adult book study is on short novella, *The Foster* by Irish author Clair Keegan. It is a short read of less than 100 pages. *The Foster* was produced as a film in Ireland and won a 2023 Academy Award nomination for best foreign film.

We will meet after worship on Sunday, October 11, from 11:30 – 12:30 to discuss *The Foster*.

The Western Massachusetts interlibrary loan system has 107 copies of *The Foster*.

The Foster, writes the publisher, “is story of childhood, loss, and love... It is a hot summer in rural Ireland. A child is taken by her father to live with relatives on a farm, not knowing when or if she will be brought home again. In the Kinsellas' house, she finds an affection and warmth she has not known and slowly, in their care, begins to blossom. But there is something unspoken in this new household-where everything is so well tended to-and this summer must soon come to an end.”

IT'S TIME! CRAFT FAIR donation time!

- Please look through your gently used novels to donate for that area.
- Please look through your costume jewelry with an eye to donating pieces for another to enjoy.
- Please check those house plants to see if they might be divided. Do you have extra gently used/nearly new indoor/outdoor plant related items (pretty pots, gently used hand tools)? How about garden or plant books?
- Please consider baking for our bake sale room. Package these items in an attractive, easy to transport way. It also is very helpful to label what you've made. Pretty food sells quickly!

YOU HAVE ALREADY NOTICED...IT'S GETTING COLD

As you are once again able to take out your heavier winter clothes, remember that you have neighbors who have nothing to keep them warm. The First Congregational Church on the rotary will once again be collecting **gently used, clean, warm clothing** until **NOVEMBER 22** for men, women and children (even infants and toddlers). NOW we will also collect **CLEAN**, warm blankets. Everything will be donated to the critical work of the Springfield Rescue Mission serving your neighbors in the greater Springfield area.

Please place your donations in the box in the breezeway, or the big, blue bin outside. We accept warm clothing: coats, sweaters, vests, sweatshirts, hats, scarves, gloves, mittens, boots, etc. We also ask for **NEW** socks and underwear. Thank you for caring and taking the time to go through your closets. Your continued generosity will warm the lives of our neighbors in need during the coming cold winter months.

Mission & Outreach

PRAYER

O God, let the world's beauty and your mercy not be hidden by the passing clouds of self-absorption or preoccupation with ourselves. Keep our eyes open to the grace and glory that are always present. May we be continually prepared to see that goodness in people around us and, at the same time, mindful of the shadows and blindness that obscure God's care and goodness. Remind us always that to be fully alive is to be open to your glory in all things. Amen.



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