

Look – With the Light!

4th Sun. in Lent – 03/19/23 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: Isaiah 42:14-21 Pastor Keith Besel

v. 18, [Yahweh cries out against His people,] **“Hear, you deaf, and look, you blind, that you may see!”**

v. 21, [Yahweh declares for all people,] **“The LORD was pleased, for His righteousness’ sake, to magnify His law and make it glorious.”**

Introduction

⌘ When our children were still participating in athletics, I remember wrestling with a great dilemma at almost all of the 1000s of games/contests we would attend. We wanted to get good pictures so that we could have a record of their activities for later in life – like now. But at the same time, Mary Beth and I eventually realized that whoever was trying to take the pictures, often “missed out” on fully experiencing and sometimes even seeing all that was going on because we were trying so hard to get the “perfect” picture.

→ A tour guide in Israel was known to tell the groups he led that one of the most repeated reasons he heard for people wanting to return to Israel for a *second* visit was to “see it without the camera lens”, for much the same reason that I’m not as obsessed with taking pictures now as I used to be; so that in their second visit, they might be able to see and understand things as they really look.

⌘ In our Old Testament Reading today, Yahweh says that His people have been seeing things only through their own self-centered lens so that they have missed the full picture that God actually intends for them to see, regarding the true state of their depravity, His will for them in this earthly life and His desire to save them and be with them for eternity.

→ The only correction for this blindness is Jesus, who gives us eyes to look at everything with Himself as the Light of the World.

I. God’s people - looking at things all wrong!

⌘ If the eye doctor tells you that you are “myopic” it means you’re “nearsighted”; that without glasses or contacts you can only see things that are close up, but you are basically blind to everything else that is going on around you.

→ The same term is used to describe a person who is “unable or unwilling to understand a situation or the way that their actions will affect things in the future.” Their “myopic” refusal to act prudently now; in the short-term will undoubtedly cause them problems in the long-term.

⌘ This was not only a problem, Yahweh says, with His people Israel as we find them in our text in exile in Babylon because they have rebelled against God, but it has been the problem with God’s people throughout history right up to and including us today.

⌘ You see, it has to do with our very nature. As King David confessed in Psalm 51:5, all of us were conceived in sin, and born into this utterly sin-darkened world.

→ This corruption of God’s perfect Creation affects us both physically and spiritually. Physically, our eyes do not work or continue to work the way that God originally designed them. Many people have physical blindness or various kinds of sight impairments from birth. And for those of us who are no longer young, we see that the longer we live in this fallen world, the more our eyesight deteriorates with age.

→ But far more important is sin’s impact upon our spiritual eyesight. As a result of sin’s influence from people around us; from the media; from our culture and mostly from our own sin-

corrupted hearts and minds, we now struggle with the urge and desire to look at things that we shouldn't. We watch things on TV and in Movies that are not only inappropriate for our young children or grandchildren to see, but in God's eyes, are inappropriate for anyone to see. Think of the how many graphic murders or beatings or sexual acts you have witnessed firsthand in your own home as you've watched on your TV or on some other screen. Consider how many times a day someone searches for something on the internet with their phone. Did you know that 1/5 of all mobile internet searches are for pornography! (<https://www.covenanteyes.com/pornstats/>)

→ And that doesn't even touch the countless ungodly glances that our eyes have made and lingered upon in real life. It might even be our neighbor's brand new car or kitchen remodel that we have been viewing through the sin-steeped lenses in our minds so that we are jealous or resentful or worse toward them because of it.

⊗ Yes, our sin-clouded lenses so quickly make even the things that God gives and intends for our good appear to be just ordinary and boring; or even worse, as something that might be harmful for us.

→ Think of how water, bread, and wine are interpreted when you first see them. Are they now only substances that can quench and satisfy your palate or do you see them as instruments through which God has deigned to drown your sinful self and work new faith and life in your baptism or to feed you in your physical flesh with the true body and blood of Jesus for your forgiveness?

→ Look at how Jesus' own disciples in verses 1-2 of our Gospel reading were blinded so that they thought of the blind man as being somehow worse of a sinner rather than one who was especially blessed to receive Christ's healing power.

⊗ As verse 17 of our text shows us, all of this wrongful-seeing stems from, and is connected to the evil worship of idols; whether they are made of wood or metal, or are the worship of some other person or thing. Remember, an idol is anything; anything that we make more important to us than the One true God.

→ And sadly, we've all worshipped false gods. When we do, we see here how profoundly God is affected by our looking at things the wrong way. In verse 14 He shows us how He holds His peace and restrains Himself – as He says, “for a long time”.

→ In fact, He likens Himself at the point of our text to a woman who is in labor, “crying out, gasping, and panting”. He has come to the point where His wrath and His judgement against sin must now come out!

⊗ At the same time though, this image is God's way of showing us that out of His wrath and judgement, He fully intends that a new life will emerge for His people.

→ Yes, He tells the people in verse 15 that He is making ready the way for His own reconstruction; His recreating of things as He brings new life out of dried up souls.

⊗ Yahweh always intended for His people to look at things in a much better way. From early on in Genesis 12:(1-3) God promised Abram that His chosen people were called to be a blessing for all nations. But now He says in verse 19 that they have become His “blind servant”.

→ Friends, God is talking there about us as well! Our eyes see God's deeds in creation, in His Word, but far too often we don't pay attention to them as we should. Our ears hear our Lord's words, but still we do not observe them as we should.

II. God Himself restores the way we see things.

- ⊗ In spite of all that, God not only promises to do something about our blindness, He promises that He Himself will restore the way that we see things. And it all begins in verse 18 with a call to repentance. “Hear, you deaf, and look, you blind, that you may see!”
 - Before we can truly see, we must first admit through confession that God is actually right, we can't see; we can't hear because we have sinfully closed our spiritual eyes and ears.
 - In today's Gospel Reading, the blind man admits his ignorance several times. But did you notice, how the Pharisees keep talking about how much they “know”. Yet go figure, the blind man ends up seeing more and more clearly, while the Pharisees, who more than anyone else at the time should have been “seeing,” just become more and more blind to Jesus and His truth.
 - In John 9:39, Jesus says, “For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind”.
- ⊗ God's restoration continues beyond confession with His absolution of sin through His gifts of Word and Sacraments.
 - In John 3:3 Jesus points to God's saving work in baptism and says, “Unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God”. Once our old sinful selves are drowned, a new person – with new and improved vision – arises out of the water.
 - As Yahweh says in verse 16, this giving of spiritual sight is entirely God's miraculous work, “And I will lead the blind in a way that they do not know, in paths that they have not known I will guide them. I will turn the darkness before them into light, the rough places into level ground. These are the things I do,” God says, “and I do not forsake them.”

III. God calls His people to look with the Light of the World.

- ⊗ Yes, God is the one who calls His people to look and see with the Light of the World.
 - He intends for you and me to return again and again – daily to the font where He converted us and opened our eyes so that we will see things with the Light of the world; the Light that makes all the difference in the world.
- ⊗ The ones who are truly “blind” in this world are the ones, like the people of Israel and the Jewish leaders before Jesus, who see things only with earthly eyes.
- ⊗ But Jesus, The Light of the World changes how we look at things. Now through the eyes of faith that He has given us, we see that baptism is so much more than simple water. Now we understand that The Lord's Supper is so much more than simple bread and wine. Now we cherish them and crave them as God's powerful gifts of grace and forgiveness and salvation!
- ⊗ We also grasp now that suffering is not only punishment. As Jesus told His disciples in verse three of our Gospel Reading (Jn. 9:3), God allows suffering at times in order that it may become a display His powerful work of presence and mercy in our lives.
 - We call this the “theology of the cross”, where the earthly eye sees only suffering and evil and believes that God is nowhere to be seen. But the eyes of faith are gifted to see in the same suffering, that our Lord is powerfully at work for the good of His people and His almighty glory.
 - Yes, the cross of Jesus is the greatest glory ever! Recall how darkness covered the entire land when the One who is the Light of the World hung and died on the cross!
 - And yet you and I know in all confidence and comfort, down to the deepest recesses of our being, that it is there and then, as verse 21 of our text says, that “Yahweh was pleased, for His righteousness' sake, to magnify His law and make it glorious”; to work the complete forgiveness of all sin, and to give the shining gift of eternal life and light to all who see Jesus alone as their Light and Lord!

Conclusion

✘ Whatever it is that weighs most heavily on your heart right now, look at it friends with the Light of the World. His is the light that shines in the midst of family troubles; in the darkness of deep depression and grief. Jesus is a light that your own doubts cannot put out.

➔ In Jesus, you have the light that nothing whatsoever – not even your own death – can overcome. As much as this dark world tries, it will never put it out! Amen.