

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Third Sunday in Advent, December 16, 2018

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 64, 66:1-3, 65, 37, 284:1-4.

Lessons: Isaiah 42:1-17, Ephesians 4:17-32, John 9:1-41.

Sermon Text: Isaiah 42:16.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

None of us gathered here has ever experienced real physical blindness. It must be terrible, not being able to see. We probably think first about stumbling around in darkness. We might think of hurting ourselves on things we can't see in the darkness. We might think of not being able to go where we want to go.

We really don't experience darkness like the people in Bible times did. We are so accustomed to having light everywhere, and all night, that to experience any real darkness, real, complete blindness is most unusual for us. But perhaps you have been in a cave when the guide turned off all the lights and had you cover up your glowing cellphones and even your watches to experience total darkness. Well, that is really what complete blindness is like.

Peter tells believers: ***“But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.”*** 1 Peter 2:9-12 (NIV)

Today let's talk about

BLINDNESS

- 1. Mankind is spiritually blind by nature.**
- 2. The solution for this blindness**

God is here speaking of those who are spiritually blind. That, of course, includes all mankind, by nature. Man is spiritually blind so that he loves darkness more than light. Jesus himself said: ***“This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil.”*** John 3:19 (NIV)

Even more than being blind, mankind is an enemy of God who opposes and hates God, His will and His Word.

Mankind does not even realize just how blind he really is. In his spiritual blindness after the fall into sin man does not even realize how hopeless his situation is. Look at Adam when God confronted him in Genesis 3. God reproached and exposed Adam when he said: ***“Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?”*** (Genesis 3:11). Look at how foolishly Adam acted and spoke after the fall. All mankind, just like Adam, tries to find solutions such as “hiding,” “denial,” or “blaming someone else.”

The most gifted human being could not perform any better than Adam did when confronted by God's accusing law. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians: ***“The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are***

spiritually discerned.” (2:14) Human reason is spiritually blind after the fall and really does not understand anything. Because of this we must assume that everything we and other people by nature, because of our sinful flesh, even even think about regarding spiritual matters is wrong. Within ourselves we must realize that we just can't even imagine which way to go that would be the right path.

The attempts to solve the problem that we see Adam try are repeated in different ways by unbelievers throughout history without success. Yet man today in his supposed wisdom thinks that he is smart and even brilliant. Unbelievers even mock and make great fun of the “stupidity” of those who believe in God and his six 24-hour days of creation.

Paul put it this way, in encouraging believers not to follow in the ways of the unbelievers, the Gentiles: ***“This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart.”*** Ephesians 4:17-18 (KJV)

But knowing that the Holy Spirit gives us lost people a sure guide and basis for our existence is a great comfort. In Psalm 119:105 we read: ***“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.”*** We should hold the words of the apostles and prophets as being more certain than our reason and senses, just as Peter writes in 2 Peter 1:19: ***“And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.”*** Where Paul speaks about our having ***“put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator”*** (Colossians 3:10), he also urges us to ***“let the word of Christ dwell in [us] richly as [we] teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as [we] sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in [our] hearts to God”*** (v 16). Paul also writes: ***“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work”*** (2 Timothy 3:16, 17). For this reason we ought not to despair at the consequences Adam's fall brought on all of his descendants. We are not left to spiritual darkness and blindness. Through his word the Holy Spirit gives us true knowledge of God. And just like the apostles we also are to have greater confidence in the words of Scripture than in our own senses and understanding. God's Word is truth.

Those who by nature were blind, and those who, being under convictions of sin and wrath are quite at a loss and know not what to do with themselves, God will lead by a way that they did not know, will show them the way to life and happiness through Jesus Christ, who is the way, the truth and the life. God will guide them on that way, which before they did not know.

In the conversion of Paul, he was struck blind first, and then God revealed his Son to him, and made the scales to fall from his eyes. Men are weak in knowledge, and the truths of God at first seem unintelligible; but God will make darkness to be light before them, and knowledge shall then be easy to them.

Men are unable to follow God's commands and his law, except perhaps to try to avoid punishment. This is the law as a curb.

But God will make crooked things straight; the path shall be level, and the yoke easy. Those whom God brings into the right way he will continue to guide in it.

Isaiah repeatedly speaks of deliverance from earthly enemies and captivity alongside of his talking about spiritual deliverance through Christ. As a type or symbol of this, he will lead the Jews, when they return out of captivity, in a road to their own land again, and nothing shall occur to trouble or embarrass them in their journey. These are great and kind things, very great and very kind; but lest anyone should say, “They are too great, too kind, to be expected from God by such an undeserving people as that of the Jews, such an undeserving world as that of the Gentiles,” God adds, ***“These are the things I will do; I will not forsake them.”*** These things will I do unto them, take my word for it that I will, and I will not forsake them. The one who begins to show this great mercy will go on to do them good.

2.

Man is spiritually blind and dead. But it is not the will of God that man should remain in such a lost condition. It is the good and gracious will of God that the image of God, lost by man's fall into sin, should again be restored unto man. God promised that this would be done, and then ***“when the fullness of the time was***

come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons” Galatians 4:5-6.

The blind will find paths on which to walk. These are the spiritually blind who by themselves cannot find a way. God will find a way to bring them safely to himself. God will guide them. God will turn the darkness into light. God does all this. He will cause the spiritually blind to see and walk on smooth paths. In these words, God showed Isaiah the first coming of Jesus Christ, the gathering of believers, and the second coming of Jesus Christ, the servant, and the final day of judgment, all in one picture. On the one hand, God will bring judgment to the earth, but on the other, he will lead and guide his own. He pledged, ***“I will not forsake them.”***

In the prophecies of Isaiah we repeatedly find words of encouragement that God will lead us out of our spiritual blindness into his marvelous light. For example, we read in chapter 29: ***“In that day the deaf will hear the words of the scroll, and out of gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind will see. Once more the humble will rejoice in the LORD; the needy will rejoice in the Holy One of Israel.”*** Isaiah 29:18-19 (NIV) We also read in chapter 30: ***“O people of Zion, who live in Jerusalem, you will weep no more. How gracious he will be when you cry for help! As soon as he hears, he will answer you. Although the Lord gives you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, your teachers will be hidden no more; with your own eyes you will see them. Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, ‘This is the way; walk in it.’”*** Isaiah 30:19-21 (NIV)

This is the work of the Holy Ghost. Luther teaches us “I believe that I cannot by my own thinking or choosing believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to him. But the Holy Spirit has called me by the gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith.”

We have the comfort that salvation and relief from blindness and the ability to see the way out of sin does not depend on us but on God, specifically, the work of God the Holy Ghost.

To help overcome our spiritual blindness, God gives us this comfort through his Word and Sacraments. We were initially brought out of the blindness and darkness of sin at our Baptism. Regularly in our worship services we have opportunity again to receive comfort from the Lord’s Supper for the assurance of the forgiveness of our sins. That is a visible sign and seal of Jesus taking away our spiritual blindness.

We close with these words of encouragement from Peter: ***“His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins.”*** 2 Peter 1:3-9 (NIV)

Lord, give us true sight! Take away our blindness and let us see our salvation in Jesus Christ! Amen.