

4th S. in Lent 3/19/23
Isaiah 42:14-21 A

I WILL LEAD THE BLIND IN A WAY THAT THEY DO NOT KNOW, IN PATHS 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, AND I DO NOT FORSAKE THEM.

Most of you are probably familiar with the story of Helen Keller. When Helen was only a few months old, a disease left her both blind and deaf. Isolated from everything that was going on around her, she became – I think it's fair to say -- quite a handful. She would eat food off of anyone's plate, she would scream and shout, smash dishes and lamps, and in short, be a little terror. Relatives thought she was a monster and encouraged her parents to put her in an institution.

Can you imagine being both blind and deaf? Or, perhaps even more troubling – what if you were the parent of a child who was both blind and deaf? What could you do to discipline? Calmly explain what she'd done wrong? Yell at her at the top of your lungs? Either way, it wouldn't do any good. She couldn't hear you, or see you. So, what would you do?

In our sermon text for this morning, God speaks of his nation Israel, who was about to go into captivity in Babylon for their rebellion against God. They, too, were blind and deaf. Not physically blind and deaf like Helen Keller, but they were blind to all of God's loving acts he had done for them. They were deaf to hear his Word. And what could God do if they wouldn't look to Him and listen to Him?

What God did was take it upon Himself to save those spiritually blind and deaf, to lead us from the deafness and blindness of sin to salvation,

“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, and I do not forsake them” (v. 16).

Blind and deaf. That’s the way God described the Israelites in our lesson, “Who is blind but my servant, or deaf as my messenger whom I send? Who is blind as my dedicated one, or blind as the servant of the LORD” (v. 19)? But, the question for us to consider is this: What made them blind and deaf? Isaiah tells us, “He sees many things, but does not observe them; his ears are open, but he does not hear” (v. 20). It wasn't the fact that they couldn't see or hear, but that they wouldn't see or hear. They had selective hearing.

There is a great story about President Franklin Roosevelt. He felt that many of his advisors had selective hearing. So one day, he decided to test them. Whenever they asked how he was, he responded with a smile, "I'm great thanks! I just killed my grandmother this morning!" Most responded with things like, "That's wonderful, Mr. President! Now if you could take a look at this..." or "Keep up the great work, Mr. President! Here's the report you asked for." In fact, all day, only one person actually listened. And he replied, "Mr. President, I'm sure she had it coming. Now, let's prep for your meeting..."

Selective hearing and seeing really becomes a serious problem when it's between us and God.

The Israelites chose to ignore God. They chose not to see His loving hand in rescuing them from Egypt, in providing for them in the wilderness, in bringing them safely to the Promised Land, in driving out their enemies, in blessing them in their new homes. Instead of thanking him, they

grumbled and complained against Him. They focused their sights on what they **did not** have: "We had melons in Egypt!" they whined! "This water in the desert is too bitter!" they grumbled! "We're sick of this manna and quail!" they complained!

They choose not to hear God's law and to ignore his commands not to worship other gods, and worshiped a cow made out of gold that they themselves formed! And instead of rejoicing in the blessings God had given -- especially in the promise of the Savior -- they chose to remain blind and deaf.

Ah, those foolish Israelites, we say! But, how often do we do the same thing?

We *choose* not to **see** the blessings God showers on us each day, the health, the wealth, the peace, the stuff, but instead we focus our sights on what He has not given us – You know: He didn't give me a spouse who does what I want. He didn't give me the job with the salary I want. He didn't give me the health that ought to be mine.

And we *choose* not to **hear** His law when he tells us that we are to love our neighbor, that marriage is a blessing, that coveting and lust and bitterness and little white lies are all sin and rebellion against Him. We don't want to hear that. So, we close our ears. We shut our eyes. And continue to do things **our** way instead of God's way. And we end up doing just what the Israelites did and practice selective hearing and see only what we want to see. We choose to be blind and deaf to God.

"Hear, you deaf, and look, you blind, that you may see!," God says (v. 18). As He opened the eyes of the man born blind in our Gospel, God has opened our eyes that we may see Jesus and walk by faith. He has opened our ears so that we may hear the voice of Jesus and follow Him.

Why would God do this? It had nothing to do with the worthiness or because we are more righteous than others. Rather Isaiah teaches us, “The LORD was pleased, for His righteousness’ sake” (v. 21). God did it for the sake of His righteousness – simply because He was and is a righteous and gracious God.

What comfort you and I find in that glorious Good News. No matter how much we've ignored God's Word in our past, He still begs us to come back. No matter where our eyes have strayed, He holds before us the cross of Jesus. Because Jesus always listened to the Father and obeyed him, because Jesus always looked to Him with a perfect trust and love... and because Jesus took our sin on Himself and went to the cross to die the death of our sin, we are forgiven.

In the miracle of the new birth of Holy Baptism, God opened our eyes, that we may see Jesus. He opened our ears so that we are sheep who hear the voice of the Good Shepherd Jesus and follow Him.

Paul says in this way, “At one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light” (v. 8). What does it mean to walk as a child of light? You know my well-worn illustration: Consider the headlights of your car. Your headlights guide your car, they show where to drive in the darkness. In the darkness of this valley of the shadow of death, the 10 Commandments guide us in living a Christian life. They teach us how we are in our thoughts, words, and deeds to love God and love our neighbor.

And, God, in His righteousness, feeds the faith He began in our baptism in the hearing of His Word and in the eating and drinking of Jesus’ Body and Blood so that we may walk by faith, even in the darkest of

darkness, and we may hear the voice of Jesus, no matter how loud Satan whispers His lies and accusation.

Rejoice, Dear Friends, that you can see with the eyes of faith!
Rejoice that you are a little lamb who can hear the voice of your Good Shepherd and follow Him! Amen.