

14 "For a long time I have kept silent,
I have been quiet and held myself back.
But now, like a woman in childbirth,
I cry out, I gasp and pant.

15 I will lay waste the mountains and hills
and dry up all their vegetation;
I will turn rivers into islands
and dry up the pools.

16 I will lead the blind by ways they have not known,
along unfamiliar paths I will guide them;
I will turn the darkness into light before them
and make the rough places smooth.

These are the things I will do;
I will not forsake them.

17 But those who trust in idols,
who say to images, 'You are our gods,'
will be turned back in utter shame.

18 "Hear, you deaf;
look, you blind, and see!

19 Who is blind but my servant,
and deaf like the messenger I send?

Who is blind like the one in covenant with me,
blind like the servant of the Lord?

20 You have seen many things, but you pay no attention;
your ears are open, but you do not listen."

21 It pleased the Lord
for the sake of his righteousness
to make his law great and glorious.

HOW'S YOUR VISION?

1. G R A C E
2. I D O L A T R Y

It always feels like a lot of pressure for me with the ophthalmologist. Maybe you have felt the pressure that comes with the instruction to cover the left eye and read these letters: "Is the letter a 'G' or a 'C'?" "Is the letter an 'R' or an 'A'?" "Is the letter an 'E' or a 'B'?" I know you with great eyesight can identify all the straight lines and round edges, but for some of us those subtle differences are difficult to distinguish.

We are in the home stretch of this Lenten season. We know Jesus is our champion. We know whoever believes in Jesus has eternal life. We know we need the living water of the gospel every day of our lives here on earth. And yet the old evil foe still at this late hour of lent and at this late hour of life is still trying to take our eyes off of God's Grace by blocking or blinding our eyes with the sin of idolatry. The devil did this with some of the Israelites. The devil did that with many of the Pharisees. And now we are his targets, so how is your spiritual vision? Do you still see God's Grace? Do you see the idolatry the devil is holding in front of your eyes?

Let's look at our text. Our text from the prophesy of Isaiah chapter 42 starts with the picture of pregnant woman:

14 "For a long time I have kept silent,
I have been quiet and held myself back.

But now, like a woman in childbirth,
I cry out, I gasp and pant.

The prophet Jeremiah once taught, *“The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure.”* One lie our hearts want to believe is, “I must be doing something right.” If I’m reasonably healthy, reasonably wealthy, reasonably in good standing with family and friends and others, I must be doing something right. Don’t mistake the Lord’s initial silence against sin as inactivity. The Lord in his way and in his time will put his action plan of justice and grace into action. Listen to this 2-in-1 prophecy:

¹⁵ I will lay waste the mountains and hills
and dry up all their vegetation;
I will turn rivers into islands
and dry up the pools.
¹⁶ I will lead the blind by ways they have not known,
along unfamiliar paths I will guide them;
I will turn the darkness into light before them
and make the rough places smooth.
These are the things I will do;
I will not forsake them.

Like our mountain views from the freeway, this prophecy of Isaiah looks like one big mountain, one big advent or coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. And yet just as we take the freeway exit to city roads and then country roads and see there is some significant distance between mountains so also there is significant distance between the Lord’s second advent and the Lord’s first advent. There will be justice. The arrogant mountains and hills who pretend themselves to be bigger than others will be laid waste. Those who pretend themselves to be better than others because they were able to produce a profit will find that their revenue streams will all be dried up on the day of our Lord. There will be pain when the Lord comes to this earth and that pain will be similar to the pain of childbirth, but there will also be joy.

The Lord will give spiritual sight to the spiritually blind through the message of the gospel. And through the saving and sanctifying message of the gospel the Good Shepherd will guide his sheep to streams of living water and righteous paths. Everything is fine for those who believe in Jesus, but everything is not fine for those who don’t see Jesus anymore because they have been blinded by idolatry.

Listen to the prophet:

¹⁷ But those who trust in idols,
who say to images, ‘You are our gods,’
will be turned back in utter shame.
¹⁸ “Hear, you deaf;
look, you blind, and see!
¹⁹ Who is blind but my servant,
and deaf like the messenger I send?
Who is blind like the one in covenant with me,
blind like the servant of the Lord?
²⁰ You have seen many things, but you pay no attention;
your ears are open, but you do not listen.”

The servant Israel saw the Red Sea turn into dry ground. The servant Israel heard the Ten Commandments. The servant Israel saw Judge after Judge, from Othniel to Samson, deliver them from their enemy time and again. The servant Israel heard the promise of an everlasting kingdom if they were faithful and walked in the ways of the LORD. How was the vision of this servant Israel? Didn’t the servant Israel see the letters G-R-A-C-E? The

servant saw grace. The servant heard of grace, but they paid no attention. They did not listen. They were blinded by the idolatry of their time. Can you see the idolatry of servant Israel? How about the idolatry of the Pharisees in today's Gospel?

The Pharisees had the perfect servant Israel in their midst. The Pharisees saw the perfect servant Israel give sight to a blind man and many other miracles. The Pharisees heard the perfect servant Israel preach and teach the law and the gospel with their own ears, but the Pharisees paid no attention and the Pharisees did not listen. Certainly, you see the idolatry of the Pharisees. Certainly, you see how the Pharisees saw themselves as bigger and better than others? The Pharisees heard his prophecy, "Destroy this temple in three days and I will raise it up again" and the Pharisees with their hypocrisy took part in the fulfillment of this prophecy by destroying the perfect servant. Certainly, you see the idolatry of Israel and certainly, you see the idolatry of the Pharisees.

But do you see the idol factories of these times? Do you see the idol of leisure that believes why worship today when you can worship him next Sunday? Do you see the idol of career advancement that believes I can neglect my spouse and child at home because I'll make up for the lost time with all of my extra earnings? Do you see the idolatry of family first because the family can plainly see you are more interested in pleasing them first than you are in pleasing the Lord first. Family and work and recreation are all good things of God, but these good things of God become idols.

Worst of all brothers and sisters, we are so close to the finish line. We are practically at the front door of heaven. Don't you see all the many things the Lord has done for us. We have been baptized in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Don't you see this? We have been correctly instructed in the teachings of God's Word. Are you paying attention? Once again, we will come to the Lord's Table and feast on his body and blood for the forgiveness of sins and the strengthening of our faith. Are you listening?

How's your vision? Let's take one last look at this prophecy:

²¹ It pleased the Lord
for the sake of his righteousness
to make his law great and glorious.

His law is the Ten Commandments. The Ten Commandments are God's great and glorious will for how his people should live. His law is also known as the Torah. The Torah (the Hebrew word for law) is the first five books of the Bible. The first five books of the Bible contain promises, great and glorious promises of a Savior who will come and already has come and will come again. I know. The Lord has been quiet. The Lord, for now, has held himself back. Nation conspire. People plot. And they all seem to get away with it. Will the Guthrie children get justice for what has been done to their mother? The commands and promises of the Lord don't seem so great and don't seem so glorious when crimes go unpunished and promises go unfulfilled. And that's when those idols can blind us from seeing the many acts of Grace we have seen in our lives from baptism until today so how wonderful, how loving is it for the Lord who had issued warning for the Israelites and who had issued warnings to the Pharisees, issues a warning to us today, to check our spiritual vision. Make sure this late Sunday in Lent to see grace, to see the many graces the Lord has given to you in your life and don't let this vision of grace become blinded by any of the many idols. And be a good brother and sister in the faith pass this warning forward to your brothers and sister in the faith who are either neglecting the means and grace, God's word and the sacrament of the altar or brothers and sisters in the faith who are receiving the means of grace, but are letting the idols of our time endanger the eternity of their soul on this closing stretch toward salvation. Amen.