

*"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.  
<sup>15</sup>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.  
<sup>16</sup>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.  
<sup>17</sup>But those who trust in idols,  
 who say to images, 'You are our gods,'  
 will be turned back in utter shame.  
 "Hear, you deaf;  
 look, you blind, and see!  
<sup>19</sup>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?  
<sup>20</sup>You have seen many things, but you pay no attention;  
 your ears are open, but you do not listen."  
<sup>21</sup>It pleased the LORD  
 for the sake of his righteousness  
 to make his law great and glorious. (Isaiah 42:14-21)*

### **Sermon Theme: Lord, Open My Eyes**

Being in the dark is fine, until it isn't. The dark is great when you are trying to sleep. That is, until the house makes weird noises or you get up and stub your toe. The dark is great when we want privacy and to be left alone. That is, until we feel lonely and our thoughts start to get to us. Sometimes we like being in the dark of what's going because we either can't handle the truth or don't want to deal with it. Ignorance can be bliss. But not knowing means you are not prepared. You end up being reactive instead of proactive to a situation. We don't like the cover being pulled over our eyes for too long. Eventually we want to see the light.

God tells his people, "**Hear, you deaf; look, you blind, and see!**" Isaiah is writing to the people of Israel who are facing all kinds of problems. But they have no one to blame except themselves. Through Isaiah the Lord calls them on it, "**You have seen many things, but you pay no attention; your ears are open, but you do not listen**" (v.20). Ever since their great deliverance from slavery in Egypt, God shows his great power as he protects his people from their enemies. He provides for them in their time for need. When they cry out for help, God delivers. They had seen many things during their history, but they failed to pay attention.

With open ears they heard Moses and the prophets preach God's Word. They heard God clearly tell them they were his chosen people. They heard God's clear warnings. But they did not listen and take it to heart.

They did not follow the one true Lord. Many chased after the false gods of neighboring countries mixing their worship with the worship of the one true God. Corruption was rampant in their government, society, religious and regular life. A consistent refrain in the Old Testament is God blesses the people, the people take it for granted, they fall again, enemies attack, the people repent and it starts all over again. Now they are facing the Babylonians. They will be taken from their homeland. They will watch in horror as their temple and former lives are destroyed. But there is no one to blame but themselves.

I've had more than one Catechism class ask, "How could they keep doing things like that? How could they do that after everything God had done for them?" It seems so obvious. How could they be so blind? How could they be so deaf?

Maybe it's difficult to see because it's a blindness not so different from our own. There are many things that catch us by surprise or we don't know about. We are generally in the dark about what tomorrow will bring. We are in the dark how this whole COVID-19 is going to pan out for our families, community and nation. There is much darkness of what we don't know.

But some of this "darkness" is simply because we close our eyes to the problems right in front of us. This blindness sees everyone else's problems with 20/20 clear vision. You stand back in disbelief that they don't recognize what they are doing is wrong and where their actions are taking them! But we can be very far-sighted, seeing the problems at a distance, while being blind to what's in front of our own eyes in our own lives. Our false gods may not be made of wood and stone, but you may set up your family as an idol hoping the children, grandchildren, or spouse can fill the void in your life. Or we turn a blind eye to sin because we don't want to have the hard conversations. We stuff our ears so we don't hear the warnings against the idols of misplaced priorities and sin. How easily we close our eyes to what God's Word shows us because it's now what we want to read and see. How hard it is to see past the idol of ourselves that presume to know better while failing to hear and listen lovingly. So quickly we close our eyes from the opportunities that God gives us to share his Word, to share a simple invitation. Instead, we allow the darkness of fear and rejection blind and stop us.

The Lord asks, "**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? You have seen many things, but you pay no attention; your ears are open, but you do not listen**" (v. 19-20). No one is as blind and deaf as the one who has already heard and seen the truth of God's Word. They should know better. But instead of listening to the truth of God's Word, we listen to lies we tell ourselves that at least I'm here at church, I give my offerings, I give my time where I can. Instead of seeing

and paying attention to God's Word, we pay closer attention to what we have done in the past or what we are currently doing.

How much have I seen? How much have you heard of God's promises that not even the gates of hell will overcome his church? And, yet, we allow the darkness of how much future giving will be bind us in our future ministry plans. We allow the darkness of future numbers in church lead us to be satisfied with the status quo. We allow the darkness of past plans not working out the way we would like stop us from being bold in possibilities for the future. What blind-spots do you have in your life that you refuse to see? What sins are you turning a blind eye to you in your life because you refuse to see the truth?

The Lord gives you a warning. For a long time he's been quiet holding himself back. But the time will come when the Lord **will lay waste the mountains and hills...he turn rivers into islands drying up the pools** (v.15). This is a picture of Judgment Day. On that day all will be held to account before God for all they have seen, heard, and chosen to ignore. Then all will see and there will be no hiding. Like a woman giving birth, the Lord will hold nothing back.

There's another type of blindness. This one is more difficult because it means you being honest with yourself. It's confessing that you are blind. It's realizing you are in the darkness and you can't find your way out no matter how determined or how good of intentions you might have. It's acknowledging: this is what I am by nature. I am lost in the darkness of sin. I am blind to truth. Not just them, but me. It's so much more difficult because it kills my sinful nature to admit it. Some might say they would rather be in the darkness. It seems easier. And truthfully, it may be for now. Sometimes ignorance seems to be bliss. But eventually, God gives such people over to their sin. He gives them what they want so they are not only blind to their sins but blind to where they are headed...an eternity in hell. Ignorance will not be a valid excuse before God. God's will is for all to be saved. He does not delight in the death of the wicked. Hell was created for the devil and the other rebellious angels. But that's what waits for those who are blind to the truth and lost in the darkness of sin.

So God is patient. He keeps silent, waiting. He's holding himself back until the time is right. Because he has a plan. His plan is simple: **"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"** (v.16). He doesn't wait for the blind to see. He knows they won't. So he says, "I will lead them. I will send them my servant, my son, Jesus who is the light that no darkness can overcome (John 1:5)."

Jesus sees the darkness of sin that is cast over this world. He sees how we blindly walk into the devil's traps and fall into the pitfalls of temptations and his heart goes out to us. Jesus is who God first created mankind to be. Without darkness, without sin. Not blind

but seeing God's will and following it perfectly. So whenever the darkness of sin or temptation threatens to overtake him, his light shines brighter pushing against the dark.

While Jesus is on this earth, at times it looks like the darkness might win. It looks like that when Jesus is sentenced to death on a cross. It seems like it would overtake him as darkness covers the earth when Jesus hangs on the cross. Jesus faces the deepest darkness when he cries out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Even then, the darkness would not prevail. As Jesus says, "I am the light of the world." Jesus will only bow his head and give up his spirit when Satan's head is crushed and payment for all sin is made in full. And even then the darkness of death could not defeat him. On Easter morning Jesus' light shines when he rises from the dead victorious.

But in order for you to see this truth, the Lord needs to open our eyes. And that's what he does by the water and word at baptism. He leads you out of sin and unbelief, creating in you a new heart, opening your eyes to see and believe your sins are forgiven and you have peace with God. He shines his light so we see his sacrifice given and poured out for you in the Lord's Supper. By his Word we are not lost. Jesus turns the darkness into light and makes the rough places smooth showing us the path to the Father is through him.

But until he brings us to be with him, we continue to fight against this darkness. And so Jesus leads us to see the truth. Just as I need to put on my glasses every day to see clearly, we need our eyes of faith renewed in daily repentance so that we see clearly who we are and what Jesus makes us. And when that darkness of sin and doubt threatens to overtake us, Jesus is there in the Word reassuring you that he has not abandoned or forsaken you. He still is the Lord of the church and in control of all things. He continues to work all things for your good whether that's a threatening virus or it's some other struggle in your life. As a baptized child of God and in Jesus, sin does not control you. The darkness cannot overtake you. Nothing in all of creation can separate you from his love. Because all that is already mine, with the Spirit-given eyes of faith we can see clearly that it's not about me; it's about everyone else around me who needs Jesus' love. See that in these times of uncertainty you can share the certainty of Jesus' love with them. See the opportunities God has laid out for you. And when you are nervous and you feel that darkness coming, remember, see God is working in you and through you. Ultimately it's not me or you who people will see, we are masks that Jesus wears to shine his light on them. So we pray, "Lord, open my eyes to see and my ears to hear the promise of your Word and the opportunities to share you." Amen.