

Sermon March 26 2017 – Lent 4

*Based on the Reconciliation series put on by the ABC District*

## **“Repentance Leads us to the Light”**

Isaiah 42:16



Dear friends in Christ, Grace and peace from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!

For the last few Sundays we have been meditating on the theme of Repentance. On the first Sunday we talked about the need for repentance due to our sin, seeking God's forgiveness. The second Sunday we heard that repentance leads to true worship, as God calls us to worship in truth and spirit. And today we shall hear that repentance leads to the light. The Light of Christ!

Many of us, I think, are familiar with, or at least, have heard about the Hellen Keller story. Helen was both blind and deaf and on top of that, she was a very disruptive child.

She would often smash dishes and lamps and terrorize the whole household with her screaming and temper tantrums. Her relatives regarded her as a monster that should be put into an institution.

Now, what would you say if you were one her family members or a relative? You couldn't yell at her, because she was deaf. You couldn't show her the results of her tantrums so that she could see the damage she was causing, because she was blind. It was hard for the family and even worse for Helen herself.

Now, imagine you were deaf and blind yourself. That will be very difficult and sad, because you can't tell a blind person to see or a deaf person to hear, yet that's what the prophet Isaiah is calling for in our text today, that the blind will see and the deaf to hear.

Now, there are a few reasons for blindness. One of those is sickness, in Helen's case it was scarlet fever that she contracted when she was nineteen months, after many days with fever, she was expected to die, but she survived. When the fever subsided, Helen's mother soon noticed how her daughter was failing to respond when the dinner bell rang or when she passed her hand in front of her daughter's eyes. It soon became apparent that Helen's illness had left her blind and deaf.

Blind and deaf... that's how God describes the Israelites in the words of the prophet Isaiah, spiritually blind and deaf that is. But what causes spiritual blindness? In a word, sin!! Sin in all its forms and manifestations... all those things that make us focus on ourselves rather than look to the Lord in faith. It is temporal things of this world that cause us to sin, therefore blind to our gracious Lord.

The Israelites are a great example of this. God had led them out of slavery in Egypt with a mighty hand. He had parted the Red Sea and given them His commandments written in stone on Mount Sinai. He had provided for those 2 million people with manna that came from Heaven every morning, but when they were faced

with a shortage of water, what did they say to Moses? In Numbers 20 we read them complaining, "Would that we had perished when our brothers perished before the Lord. Why have you brought the assembly of the Lord into this wilderness that we should die here, both we and our cattle? There is no grain or figs or vines or pomegranates and there is no water to drink." (Numbers 20:3)

Instead of trusting in the Lord for all they needed, they saw only that they had no water. They were totally blind to the blessings that they had in the Lord. This continually happened throughout their history right up to and including the time of Christ.

They were suffering of something the doctors will call myopia. It is short-sightedness problem. Oculists say it is brought on by always looking at objects that are near. It is good then to see far, because when we focus only on the things close by we can't even begin to see our spiritual need.

That's what happened to Israelites. And even after Christ was here, they wanted only what they liked. On one occasion after feeding over 5000 people with bread and fish, the people wanted to follow him and make Him their king, but Jesus rebuked them. He did because all they wanted was a bread King who would give them free bread, they wanted free stuff. They wanted stuff for themselves, temporary things, but were blind to a greater need, their spiritual need. They too were blind and deaf, hungry yes but for physical food only.

Jesus said to them in John 6: 26, "Truly I say unto you, you are seeking me not because you saw the signs but because you ate your fill of the loaves. Do not labour for the food that perishes but for the food that endures to eternal life which the Son of Man will give to you."

Now here we are today, what is it that we think more about, in our daily lives? Stuff, perhaps, and food that fills our bellies, because we are need food, right? Or do we really think about our souls too?

How often are we so consumed with our money and bank accounts that we forget that everything we have is from the gracious hand of the Lord?

How often do we in our pride and selfishness look only to our own wellbeing and miss the blessings that our Lord has showered down upon us?

And do we realize that the better off we are materially, the more blind we become to the spiritual blessings we have in Jesus Christ? The more affluent our society becomes, the less Godly it becomes...there is a direct correlation.

Now, here is a crazy question, for us Christians, would you rather be blind or deaf? What do you think? I mean physically. One might say, "I would rather be deaf than blind, for if I were deaf I could still see." But if you were deaf you would never hear the sigh of the wind in the treetops on a summer evening, like the sigh of infinite pity and sadness. You would never hear the breaking of the waves on the seashore, like the voice of eternity. You would never hear the matins of the birds, or the voice of the orator, or the voice of the mother, or the cry of a little child, or the whisper of love, or the voice of a great congregation uplifted in praise of the triune God.

Another might say, "I would rather be blind than deaf, for if I were blind I could still hear the human voice and communicate with my fellow man." But think of what you would never see—the waving blossoms on the trees in the springtime, the blue sky, the sun rejoicing as a strong man to run a race, the stars and the moon at night. You would never see the light in a woman's eyes, you would never look on the ocean as it rolls in

splendor such as creation's dawn beheld.”

Now, as you see we can think about those things and weight on how it would be if we prefer one or the other physical malady.

But we seldom think about our spiritual blindness.

The Israelites didn't. Therefore what God said to the people of Israel, “For a long time I have held My peace; I have kept still and restrained Myself; now I will cry out like a woman in labour; I will gasp and pant. I will lay waste mountains and hills, and dry up all the vegetation, I will turn rivers into islands and dry up the pools.” The very thing that the people were grumbling about, water, is the very thing God promises to dry up. They couldn't see that it was their spiritual thirst that needed quenching because all they could think about was their physical thirst, and so God's time of patience was over. God's prophets had called them to repentance over and over again but they resisted. They had been called time and again to ask for forgiveness for their pride and selfish ways; for their trust in themselves and not in the Lord, but they would not. You would think God would throw in the towel on us pride-filled humans, but He had promised a Saviour which he did send and that Saviour is the cure for blindness and not only the cure but the Light too.

For Helen Keller the cure came in a peculiar way. For the first seven years of her life Helen wallowed in her blindness, lashing out and refusing to learn. But one day her teacher Anne Sullivan led her to the water pump and that all changed. Anne pumped some water over Helen's hand and as she did this, she spelled out water in the girl's free hand and explained what it meant. Helen finally understood. She later related the incident, “As the cool stream gushed over one hand she spelled into the other the word water, first slowly and then rapidly. Suddenly I felt a misty consciousness of something forgotten and the mystery of language was revealed to me.” How good it must have been for Helen to be given a different kind of sight. How good it is for us also to receive a different kind of sight, and how good it is to have a new light. True light!

This cure, this light is readily given to those who repent of their sins, to those who realize they have sinned but now are turning to God for forgiveness. That's what forgiveness does, grants you Jesus, for he is your forgiveness, he grants you light, for he is the True light.

Hear and see God tells us, he invites us, he calls us. Even today he calls us to repent and come to him.

Now as with Hellen somebody had to teach hear and help her to “read” so with us. It is the work of the Holy Spirit who is bringing you to repentance.

Friends, God does not desire for us to be blind, and that is why He has given us the light of the world...His Son Jesus Christ who lived and died on the cross of Calvary for the forgiveness of our sin.

God says “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 darkness before them into light, the rough places into level ground. These things I do and I do not forsake them.”

God doesn't abandon us, we abandon him with our myopia. But he is faithful and he will not forsake us. He will dry up the pools of temporal indulgence that's for sure, but he will lavish us with something else, with the water of baptism where we receive Christ and our salvation.

And as our Light, he promises that He will turn the darkness into light before us

and the rough places into level ground. He will lead us in a way that we have not known before.

It is a way that we could not have known in our spiritual blindness, but only through the work of the Holy Spirit who convicts us of our sins of pride, greed and selfishness and brings us to repentance and turns us to the light of Christ who bought our forgiveness with His life on the cross. In Christ we are given a new spiritual sight that isn't like the old one. In His light, the things of this world seem strangely dim.

Why would He do this for us? Because he loves us with a love that we can't fully understand in our selfish, pride-filled condition. Because he is full of mercy and grace that doesn't want us to die in our blindness.

No matter how much wrong we have done in our lives, God continues to show his love in his forgiveness, forgiveness that is always available for the repentant sinner.

As blind as we seem to be, He keeps on telling us anyway, "I love you and want you to be with me forever in Heaven through faith in Christ."

Into the darkness of this world and our lives Christ brings light. A light that illuminates and shows our condition but brings about the spiritual medicine we need, and also gives us the guarantee that heaven is for us.

Therefore, dear friends, as we have repented, as God has opened our eyes and our ears, let us now then walk, let us walk with Christ as our light by the faith given to us through the Holy Spirit and by His grace we struggle with the darkness of this world and our souls. Let us walk with Christ as our light holding fast to the truth proclaimed in John 1:5, "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it."

Indeed it has not...amen.