

"Real-eyes"

Text: 2 Corinthians 4:13-5:1

God grant to each of you the eyes of faith, enabling you to see what could otherwise not be seen. Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians: It is actually rather disturbing how often we don't "see" what we are seeing. Physically speaking, studies have shown that women are better than men at picking out an item in a messy drawer or on a cluttered desk. (Which works out well because men are better at *creating* messy drawers and cluttered desks.) It's right there, but men in particular can't see it. But that's not exactly true, is it? We "see" it (because it's right there) we just don't realize ("real-eyes") what we are seeing.

Studies have also shown that a sizeable majority of people don't "see" even obvious changes that happen right in front of them if they are not particularly interested in the object that changes or, more importantly, if they are focused on or preoccupied with something else. One study, for example, showed that 75% of participants failed to notice that the person who had them fill out a form was not the same person who then gave them the receipt for that completed form. In the study, the person who gave them the form bent down behind a counter to grab the receipt, a different person stood up and handed them the receipt, and only 1 in 4 noticed that it was a different person. This despite the fact that the two people behind the counter did not look like each other and wore different colored clothing.

Christians need to learn from this, since Satan undoubtedly knows all about it. We live in a world where something is *always* vying for our attention. The devil is well aware of our human limitations. He knows that if we are focused on the trivial, there is a good chance that we will miss the important things in life. More specifically, he knows that if we are constantly focused on the material, we will most often miss the spiritual. Our society – like perhaps no other in the history of the human race – has been filled with so many eye-catching distractions that we have more or less "missed" historically unprecedented spiritual and moral changes. Whenever human beings try to pack more distractions into a finite, limited amount of time, the first thing to get bumped off the plate tends to be "the one thing needful." Without that constant guide in our lives, we can expect to "miss" more and more of what is happening right in front of our eyes.

There is, however, a work-around. Those who must observe for a living (security personnel, law enforcement, etc.) are trained to see what is actually happening – to ignore distractions and to focus on (and real-eyes) what they are actually seeing. As Christians, we need that same sort of training. Our text for this morning offers just that. It seeks to train us to real-eyes what is actually there, even when the eyes of most deceive them on a

regular basis.

Our text for this morning is found in Paul's Second Epistle to the Corinthians, the Fourth Chapter:

ESV 2 Corinthians 4:13 - 5:1 *Since we have the same spirit of faith according to what has been written, "I believed, and so I spoke," we also believe, and so we also speak, ¹⁴ knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence. ¹⁵ For it is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God. ¹⁶ ¶ So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. ¹⁷ For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, ¹⁸ as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal. 5:1 ¶ For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.*

So far the very words of God. These are *God's* words, and they are therefore altogether true and right in every way. Resolve then to meditate on them- to *focus* on them – accordingly. To prepare our hearts for the study of God's Word, so we pray, "**Sanctify us by Your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth!**" Amen.

Christians study God's Word because there God has promised to meet with us and to speak to us. There God *does* speak to us. Not in some strange "whisper in your ear" sort of way, but in a way that is nonetheless real. He speaks to us in a way that you have to experience to understand. Like exercise and eating a healthy diet, you don't always notice the benefits right away, which means that lazy part in all of us will constantly lobby for us to quit the work because the benefit is negligible, at best. The reality is that sooner, rather than later, you begin to recognize the obvious benefits of regular exposure to God's Word. You gain tangible blessings like strength, confidence, wisdom, and insight. That added strength and wisdom, in turn, enables you to recognize and withstand the devil's favorite weapons – like temptation, doubt, and apathy. You find it easier to forgive, easier to talk about your faith with others and, more to the point this morning, easier to maintain your focus and see past the distractions.

Can Christians survive without regular exposure to God's Word? Maybe. Is that really a chance you want to take? "**For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?**"

What's more, Scripture never gets old. Scripture applies to life. As life changes, so do the lessons and applications of God's Word. No matter how many times you read a part of God's Word, that Word continually addresses the changing circumstances of your life. You can read a section of God's Word that you've read dozens of times before but for some reason this time God's message to you makes it through that thick layer of dull that always before seemed to cloud your vision or understanding, and you learn. And grow.

Take this morning's text. Did you notice there a rather startling redefining of what life on earth is really all about, and how our God really is supposed to be the center, the core, of our entire existence? Did you catch that section in our text?

By the time Paul wrote 2 Corinthians he had been around the block a few times. In fact the temptation to regard all of the headwinds that he encountered as signs that God was telling him to quit would have been powerful to the point of overwhelming. Listen again how, seven chapters later in this same letter, Paul summarized some of the adversity that he had been called upon to endure and overcome. There he spoke of "**...far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death. ²⁴ Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. ²⁵ Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; ²⁶ on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; ²⁷ in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. ²⁸ And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches. ²⁹ Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to fall, and I am not indignant?"** (2 Corinthians 11:23-29)

Could you imagine? Wouldn't you think it would have been incredibly tempting for Paul to regard these things as signs from God and therefore reasons to quit? Wouldn't it have been tremendously appealing to reason that an all-powerful God could and would protect him from such things if that God really wanted Paul to go on doing what he was doing? Paul had only one reason to continue doing what he was doing, which he listed in our text for this morning. Again, did you catch it? If you missed it, don't. It's critical, monumental, life-changing: "**It is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God.**" Innocuous words – until you real-eyes them; until you actually see them and the message they convey.

"*It's all about God*" is infinitely more than just a slogan. It articulates an insight that, once realized and accepted, will change the way you see life.

Even in the saving of souls, the ultimate focus was and is not the individual sinner. It is the God that saved them. Every time a sinner is brought to saving faith, that sinner for the first time is capable of offering genuine thanksgiving, honor, and praise to God. The greater the number of converts, the greater the thanksgiving. The more God's children offer their thanksgiving and praise, the more God is glorified.

What a razor sharp contrast between such divine wisdom and the humanist's notion that "*man is the measure of all things*" and that therefore "*it's all about me.*"

Don't misunderstand. Man obviously benefits immeasurably when he is brought to saving faith in Jesus Christ. The moment a sinner is brought by God the Holy Spirit to trust in the goodness of Jesus Christ for his salvation – rather than his own works or his own "goodness" – from that moment a human soul not only escapes the unimaginable eternal torment of hell, he gains an instant peace through a relationship with God, and will one day inherit the eternal bliss of heaven. Paul referred to this very thing in our text: "**For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.** But even then it's still not all about you or me. It's still all about increased thanksgiving for our God and the increase of his glory.

The World will never get that, never real-eyes it. They are too self-absorbed; too important in their own eyes. They will never see things as God does – which brings us to another amazing part of this morning's text, the Holy Spirit's encouragement to "**look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen.**"

Stop for a moment and consider what we have just been told to do. We have been told to *look* to what *cannot be seen*.

On the face of it those words sound nonsensical – to look to what you cannot see. Yet once we really get what God is telling us it makes all the sense in the world, but only to those whose eyes have actually been educated to *see* that which remains *unseen* to the unbelieving world.

For Paul to continue to preach Christ crucified in the face of such incredible hardship and persecution he had to be rock solid sure that the opposition he was facing was of Satan and not of God. In fact for anyone at all to remain Christian in the hostile environment that is planet earth we need a special sort of confidence. That sort of confidence and certainty can only be the result of a rock-solid belief in the unseen reality of the message Paul was proclaiming – that a human being can only be saved through faith in Jesus Christ. In other words, if there really are countless paths to heaven, then only a fool would subject himself to persecution and ridicule. Anyone with basic common sense would opt

always and only for the easiest path – the path of least resistance. Today that path of least resistance is parroting the nonsense that one religion is as good as any other, and to approve of everything and condemn nothing. *"I'm ok, you're ok." "Live and let live." "Don't judge." "Don't condemn."*

What's so bad about that? It sounds... nice. It's bad because Scripture says it's bad. Imagine you have a house full of dinner guests and your house starts on fire. How "nice" or how loving would it be to tell your guests to go through any door they choose when only one leads to safety and survival? So also God's Word teaches us that there is only one way for man to be saved, which is by trusting not in ourselves and our own goodness, but in the payment Jesus made for us – which alone can and has removed our sin.

By definition, Christians have been given the ability to see the unseen; to recognize and accept as true that which cannot be verified by human sight. It is the ability to know God's love even when suffering terrible loss or pain. It is the ability to deny the impulses and desires of your flesh because you know that the God that created and saved you is not pleased by such things. It is the divine gift to recognize that everything that you see here (apart from human souls) is temporary, and that it will one day simply disappear. Again from our text: ***"For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal."***

Understand that man has no real excuse here. There are countless things in our lives that are unseen, yet the Godless nonetheless believe them without question. No one here has seen electricity, but we believe it exists because we have seen its power. No one has seen love, but, again, we believe it is real because we have felt its power and witnessed its effect. How much more then when we deal with heavenly, spiritual matters? Watch a child being baptized in the name of the Triune God and Christians real-eyes a miracle of rebirth. The world sees only water being poured on a baby's head. Go to the Lord's Table and you recognize that you receive Christ's true body and blood. The world sees only bread and wine. This sort of miraculous unseen truth is all around us every day. If we but learn to look with the eyes of faith we see the Holy Spirit that is here with us and here *within* us. We see the angels that continually minister to our God by serving us, his children. We see the God to whom we pray, and ourselves as those who have been washed clean of all sin by the sacrificial sin-payment made by Jesus Christ. All of these things are unseen, and yet all are very real.

To the world: delusional. To the child of God: truth and light – reality of the absolute highest order. May God so bless each one of us with eyes that truly see, that all of us may continue to see and believe the reality of life as God himself has revealed it to us. Amen.

Scripture Readings

^{ESV} **Genesis 3:8-15** And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. ⁹ But the LORD God called to the man and said to him, "Where are you?" ¹⁰ And he said, "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself." ¹¹ He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" ¹² The man said, "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate." ¹³ Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this that you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate." ¹⁴ The LORD God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, cursed are you above all livestock and above all beasts of the field; on your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. ¹⁵ I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel."

^{ESV} **Mark 3:20-35** Then he went home, and the crowd gathered again, so that they could not even eat. ²¹ And when his family heard it, they went out to seize him, for they were saying, "He is out of his mind." ²² And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem were saying, "He is possessed by Beelzebul," and "by the prince of demons he casts out the demons." ²³ And he called them to him and said to them in parables, "How can Satan cast out Satan? ²⁴ If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. ²⁵ And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. ²⁶ And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but is coming to an end. ²⁷ But no one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man. Then indeed he may plunder his house. ²⁸ ¶ "Truly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the children of man, and whatever blasphemies they utter, ²⁹ but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin"-- ³⁰ for they were saying, "He has an unclean spirit." ³¹ ¶ And his mother and his brothers came, and standing outside they sent to him and called him. ³² And a crowd was sitting around him, and they said to him, "Your mother and your brothers are outside, seeking you." ³³ And he answered them, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" ³⁴ And looking about at those who sat around him, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! ³⁵ For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother."

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The Third Sunday after Pentecost – June 10, 2018

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn - 536 (Verses 1-4) (Red Hymnal)

"Awake My Soul, and With the Sun"

The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (Brown Hymnal)

The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

The Old Testament Lesson: (Genesis 3:8-15) Although our godless society would say that no one was hurt by Adam and Eve's sin, clearly we know that the damage was unimaginably catastrophic. God alone determines what is and is not sin. Adam and Eve's actions changed the world forever. We note also in this reading how natural it became for those who had been perfect to begin blaming others for their sins. Yet even there, at the very first fall into sin, God already in the Garden of Eden promised to send the Savior.

Psalm 85 (Supplement page 40) (Brown Hymnal)

The Gospel Lesson: (Mark 3:20-35) One of the many blessings that we tend to take for granted is the "second family" that God gives each of us when we gather with fellow believers around the Word of God. Jesus reminds of that when that house is "divided" by discord it cannot stand. He also here tells us how he feels about those who believe in him. He regards them (us) as just as precious as his own mother and brothers.

The Confession of Faith -

The Apostolic Creed – page 15. (Brown Hymnal)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 777 (Brown Hymnal)

"Amazing Grace"

The Sermon – Text: 2 Corinthians 4:13 – 5:1 (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

"Real-eyes"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Post-Sermon Hymn – 425 (Verses 1-2, 5-6) (Red Hymnal)

"All Depends on our Possessing"

The Prayer followed by the Lord's Prayer

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn - 536 (Verses 5-6) (Red Hymnal)

"Awake My Soul, and With the Sun"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors who might be with us this morning and invite you to join us every Sunday at this time. St. Paul is a congregation in fellowship with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) – a conservative Lutheran synod with churches and missions throughout the United States, as well as Canada, India, and Africa. We are glad you are here. Thank you for letting us share the Word of God with you. Please record your visit in our Guest Book, and come again!

Attendance – Sunday (46) Ave (41)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour
	-11:15 p.m.	– Church Council Meeting
Next Sunday	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service w/ Holy Communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour

CLC News – Pastor Mark Tiefel has returned the call to Luther Memorial of Fond du Lac, WI. Pastor Caleb Schaller is considering the call to Berea of Inver Grove Heights, MN. Teacher Ann Sprengeler has returned the call to Redeemer of Cheyenne, WY.

Communion Schedule – Just a reminder that Holy Communion will be celebrated during the service next Sunday, and not on the 24th as would be the regularly scheduled date. We return to our regular communion schedule (second and fourth Sunday) in July.

Farewell Fellowship – Our fellowship hour this morning is dedicated to Mike and Eileen McEnroe, who will be moving to their new home in Fargo this week. Mike and Eileen were charter members here at St Paul and were instrumental in the establishment of this congregation. The Lord bless and keep you, Mike and Eileen!

Papers Available – Please see Pastor Roehl or Delegates Phil Pfennig, Sam Meyer, and Mark Johnson for copies of the essays presented at the recent West Central Delegate Conference here in Bismarck.

Summer Activities – Many different CLC sponsored activities are again scheduled for this summer. For a listing, or for information, please see Pastor Roehl.

Church Council Meeting – The Church Council is scheduled to meet this morning during the fellowship hour.