

Pre-Lent: Sexagesima Sunday | St. John 12:35-43  
January 31, 2016 | Parkland Evangelical Lutheran Church

**In Nomine Iesu**

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Almighty and most merciful God, who in the beginning created the light, and in the fullness of time gave Your only begotten Son to be unto the end of the world the true Light of men, we humbly ask You, so to illumine our hearts with the beams of Your grace that we may walk in Your light as children of light and be made partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light; through Your dear Son Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, ever one God, now and forever. Amen. (*The Lutheran Liturgy*, p. 67)

*Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. (Rom. 1:7, etc.)*

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*The sermon text for this morning is taken from the twelfth chapter of the Gospel according to St. John. We read selected verses in Jesus' name:*

So Jesus said to them, "The light is among you for a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you. The one who walks in the darkness does not know where he is going. While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light." / When Jesus had said these things, He departed and hid Himself from them. Though He had done so many signs before them, they still did not believe in Him, so that the word spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: "Lord, who has believed what he heard from us, and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?" Therefore they could not believe. For again Isaiah said, "He has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, lest they see with their eyes, and understand with their heart, and turn, and I would heal them." Isaiah said these things because he saw His glory and spoke of Him. / Nevertheless, many even of the authorities believed in Him, but for fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it, so that they would not be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God. <sup>(ESV)</sup>

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*These are Your words, heavenly Father. Sanctify us by Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen. (Jn. 17:17)*

In Christ Jesus, the true light who came to rescue all who walk in darkness, dear fellow redeemed:

The phrase "seeing is believing" was essentially coined by the Lord's apostle Thomas. He said that he would not believe in Jesus' resurrection unless he saw Him with his own eyes and put his finger into the marks made by the nails and spear. But that sort of proof should not have been necessary. Jesus had stated several times that on the third day after His death, He would rise again (Mt. 16:21, 17:23, 20:19). So what Thomas was really saying was that his experience should carry more weight than the Word of Jesus. Jesus later said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen Me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" (Jn. 20:29).

Thomas' reluctance to believe without personal, firsthand evidence is something we can relate to. Spiritually speaking, we are blind to the truth of God from the moment we come to be, from our conception (Ps. 51:5). We are born skeptics, not wanting to trust something that doesn't square with our sensibilities. But God is gracious toward us. He casts the seed of His Word our

way, and He causes that Word to take root and grow in our hearts. Through His Word, He shows us the darkness of our hearts by nature, leads us to repent of our sins, and brings us to faith in His Son who obtained forgiveness and salvation for all. **The Word of Jesus Opens Our Eyes and Our Hearts.**

## I

How is it possible that the people of Jesus' day could watch Him perform so many miracles and still not believe in Him? Jesus cast out demons, raised up the paralyzed, caused the mute to speak, opened the eyes of the blind, and brought the dead back to life. But miraculous signs alone were not enough to bring the people to faith. These things were displays of Jesus' divine power, but they were not the power of God for salvation. The power of God for salvation is the Gospel message (Rom. 1:16). The Gospel is the good news that the Son of God has come into this dark world in human flesh, in order to deliver us from the darkness of death and sin through His death and resurrection. The light of His grace shines into our hearts and brings us the forgiveness and righteousness that we could never manufacture on our own.

Even though this is wonderful news, it is not always welcome. Sinners don't like to admit the dark depths of their sin. They might look at Jesus as a good example to follow and then trust their own abilities to live a more-or-less holy life. They might see the sin in others clearly enough but fail to recognize their own pile of transgressions. They might think they can stay on the narrow path of righteousness without having any real desire continuously to hear and learn God's Word. Such individuals do not recognize the utter spiritual darkness that characterizes every natural born human. Besides being spiritually blind, we are born into the kingdom of darkness, the kingdom of death and the devil, which is utterly opposed to the kingdom of God. Left on our own, we could never find our way out of this darkness.

But God had a plan to save us. He sent His Son into the dark world with the light of truth and grace. *"I am the light of the world,"* said Jesus. *"Whoever follows Me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life"* (Jn. 8:12). *"I have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in Me may not remain in darkness"* (Jn. 12:46). Isaiah prophesied about this light more than 700 years earlier when he said, *"Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you. For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the LORD will arise upon you, and His glory will be seen upon you"* (60:1-2).

Still, not everyone welcomes the light of Jesus' arrival. Light is never appreciated by those who want to keep their sins hidden. To them, light is an enemy; it exposes their wickedness. As Jesus said, *"And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed"* (Jn. 3:19-20). The law of God turns on our inner security light. It alerts us that something is going on that shouldn't be. It reveals our sin. The law is something like a police spotlight that illuminates a dark backyard full of underage drinkers. What happens? Some run and try to hide in the shadows; others recognize there is nowhere to run and own up to what they have been doing. That's the way it is for us too. When the law reveals our sin and accuses our conscience, we either try to hide the sins further from view and act like they never happened, or we acknowledge them. We repent. We tell God what He already knows; we have sinned.

Those who consistently ignore their sins, tucking them away, are the ones who retreat further into darkness, whose eyes are blinded in unbelief. These are the ones to whom Jesus remains hidden. As long as they do not repent of sin, they are telling God that they do not need forgiveness. And if they do not need forgiveness, then they do not need Jesus because He came to save sinners.

But for those whose eyes have been opened to their utter sinfulness, who repent of their sins, Jesus shines His light of forgiveness into their hearts. His light beams into every nook and cranny. There is no sin so deeply hidden that He cannot uncover it and relieve you of it. The roots of sin might go deep, but not too deep for God to get at. God planted your sins on Jesus, and burned them all up in the fire of His wrath when Jesus suffered in your place on the cross. God has not left any part of your salvation to be accomplished by you. It has all been accomplished for you by your Savior. By the power of this Gospel, He has now planted faith in your heart and credited you with the righteousness of Jesus.

## II

This is the teaching of the Bible, the Word of God. Any teaching that says that sin is no big deal, or that you are good enough for God just the way you are, or that you are righteous because of what you do, is a false teaching. The Bible does not teach these things. From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible is about Jesus and what He did to save you. This is the message that God called me to proclaim as your pastor.

When I look from face to face today, I remember so many kindnesses you have shared with me and my family, so many prayers and gifts and encouragements, more than I can count. What I have given you was not even mine in the first place. I am an under-shepherd of Christ (1Pe. 5:1-4), a steward of His mysteries (1Cor. 4:1). My call here was to preach the Gospel and administer the Sacraments in your midst. But those gifts were not from me; they were from God. And He will continue to give these gifts to you through the faithful work of your other pastors, and God-willing, from a new pastor before long. It is hard for us to say goodbye, but even though we will be separated from each other by hundreds of miles, we will still be one in Christ. We will find daily comfort in the same baptism, we will partake of the same body and blood of Jesus, and we will be joined forever in the great kingdom of light around the throne of God. The closeness we have by faith in Christ is a bond greater than proximity and even greater than blood.

My fervent prayer for all of you is that you continue to hear the Word of God. The devil, the world, and your own sinful flesh do not want you to have it. Today's Holy Gospel (Lk. 8:4-15) describes those who harden their hearts to the Word, who deny the Word when trials and temptations come, who chase after the riches and pleasures of life and ignore the Word. The sermon text mentioned the leaders of the Jews who believed in Jesus but were not willing to confess Him. It is recorded that *"they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God."* All these things could be said about you and me, too, at various points in our lives.

But God's patience for you has not run out. Even now He is scattering the seed of His Word in this very place, He is sending the light of grace to your heart. Your failure to honor His Word, to diligently hear it and learn it, to live in line with it, all of this is forgiven and forgotten by Him.

God is still on speaking terms with you. He wants to continue to plant His Word in your heart, so that your faith grows and matures. Then you will be prepared to confess your faith even when you expect harsh consequences. His Word that opens your eyes to the truth about your sinfulness and His grace, that opens your heart to believe in your Savior, will open your mouth also to speak His truth.

*“The light is among you for a little while longer,”* said Jesus. *“While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light.”* God does not need to prove His love for you by any special miracle or sign. He has already proven His love by sending Jesus to save you. You know about this because God has given you His Word. Through this Word, the light of Jesus will continue to cheer your heart until He brings you to heaven above. There, there will be no more darkness, no more sin, and no more death, only the pure, bright light of God’s presence for all eternity.

*Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, forevermore. Amen.*

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