

# "It's Not Evil If No One Sees"

Texts: Luke 22:52-53

*Alas, my god, my sins are great, my conscience doth upbraid me;  
And now I find that in my strait no man hath power to save me.  
And fled I hence in my despair in some lone spot to hide me,  
My griefs would still be with me there and peace still be denied me.  
Lord, Thee I seek. I merit naught; yet pity and restore me.  
Just God, be not Thy wrath my lot; Thy Son hath suffered for me. (TLH 317)*

Dear Fellow Christians: how would you feel if everything that you did, said, or thought was somehow recorded and replayed on an enormous big-screen TV for all the world to see? How would something like that affect your life and conduct? A better question might be *why* would something like that affect your conduct? Isn't a sin a sin no matter who sees or knows? Isn't all sin an offense, first and foremost, against God, who sees and knows everything at all times? So why is it that sin that is *revealed to my neighbor* commands so much more importance in our minds and holds so much more terror for us? The answer, of course, is pride. We don't seem to be so concerned about guarding our lives from sin that is never revealed to mankind – sin that is known only to God – because such "hidden" sin causes us no personal embarrassment. We are much more concerned with sin if it will cause us humiliation or shame; that is, sin that is revealed.

This morning, having entered the season of Lent, we examine one of the great "Lies of Lent," focusing this morning on the lie that *"it is not really evil if no one sees you."* Our text is from the 22<sup>nd</sup> Chapter of Luke's Gospel:

**<sup>ESV</sup> Luke 22:52-53** *Then Jesus said to the chief priests and officers of the temple and elders, who had come out against him, "Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs? <sup>53</sup> When I was with you day after day in the temple, you did not lay hands on me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness."*

These are the words of God. In complete confidence that these words are altogether true and right, and therefore absolutely trustworthy, and worthy therefore of our study, so we pray, **"Sanctify us by your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth!"** Amen.

Perhaps some of you have some childhood recollections of the time when you first came to truly understand what it means that God sees and knows *everything* that we do, say, and even think. Yikes! This tends to be a most disturbing revelation to a young sinner who had thought he was getting

away with whatever was not discovered by man. It tends to cast a whole new light on pretty much everything. Sneakiness became instantly obsolete. It was pointless to try to get away with anything if God was always watching and always saw. It was worse than having a little brother or sister who would always tag along with you and report every little "indiscretion" back to mom and dad. Just as God cannot be fooled by a hypocrite, so too he is never deceived by the sneak. (The purpose, by the way, for revealing to a child that "God sees all" is not to frighten him into better behavior but to teach him that both sin and obedience, like faith itself, is a matter first and foremost of the heart.)

The world acts and reasons much like the child who does not yet understand the omniscience of God. The cause for such faulty reasoning among the ungodly is their experience. Like children who succeed in deceiving mom and dad, experience teaches the unbeliever that there are no obvious *earthly* consequences for that which is never discovered. Yet even an honest unbeliever knows in his heart that he really doesn't get away with anything. There is a mental, emotional, and spiritual price to pay for every secret, evil action. Even unbelievers have a hard time convincing themselves that they really get away with what is not seen by man. If that were actually possible, then why do they struggle so desperately to rationalize away their ever-present guilt?

The same sort of nonsense finds its way into both the Christian Church and into the hearts of the individual children of God. We love to gasp and be shocked at public sins, as though they are somehow much worse in the eyes of God than our own "hidden" sins. It is, in fact, sinful pride that motivates most of the ranking of sins among us. Why else would we feel so much more shame for being ticketed for speeding than we would for speeding without getting caught? Why else would we feel so much more shame for conceiving a child out of wedlock than we would for fornicating secretly? Or why, for that matter, do we imagine that a one-time act of stealing (and getting caught) is scandalous, but a lifelong obsession with daily gossiping is not?

All of this forms the basis for the lie of the devil that *"It is not a sin if no one sees you."* Our text for this morning reveals how man pretends that he can hide his actions from God, and centers our thoughts on the words of Jesus during his arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane. Note especially Jesus' words, ***"When I was with you day after day in the temple, you did not lay hands on me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness."***

Those who are not ashamed of their actions - those who believe their actions are good and right - have no problem operating "in the light." They have no problem doing openly and without secrecy whatever it is they are doing. The sinner, on the other hand, loves what Jesus described in our text as **"the power of darkness,"** and he loves it for two reasons – even though he knows, in the end, that it is all just an illusion. First, because darkness provides the self-deception of invisibility. Darkness creates the illusion of being unseen. So the soldiers and religious leaders of Jesus' day refused to carry out their actions in plain sight and instead chose the cover of darkness. Yet darkness hides nothing from God. It provides only a false sense of secrecy.

The second "power of darkness" is the illusion of immunity. In human terms, we fool ourselves into believing that we "get away with" whatever is not discovered. So the soldiers and Jewish rulers cloaked themselves with the self-deception that darkness would help them to get away with whatever they had in mind to do to Jesus. If they are never seen, they cannot be charged. If they are never charged, then they would not only "get away with it," then too they could convince themselves that what they did was not actually wrong or sinful. So the second power of darkness is nothing more than a lie – an illusion that if the deed is not seen by man, then there can be no punishment – In this life or the next.

Interestingly enough, man *knows* it is a lie, but it is a lie he wants to believe. Even unbelievers can recognize how silly it is to imagine that they can hide from God (if they believe that God does in fact exist). So they often come up with fallback arguments or positions.

You are familiar with "fallback arguments" or "fallback positions," although you may not necessarily know them as such. Here's an example: *"I didn't steal the money. And if I did, it was only because I was trying to feed my hungry children. And I won't do it again."*

Another text from the Passion history illustrates what amounts to a fallback position for those who want to believe that they can survive lying to God: **Luke 22:63-65 "Now the men who were holding Jesus in custody were mocking him as they beat him. <sup>64</sup> They also blindfolded him and kept asking him, "Prophecy! Who is it that struck you?" <sup>65</sup> And they said many other things against him, blaspheming him."** The fallback argument or position here is that if we cannot hide our actions from God, then perhaps we can blind God to those actions. In other words, even if I'm caught, maybe there is still a way for me to escape.

The soldiers blindfolded the omniscient Son of God and mocked him. Did they imagine that they could somehow diminish the knowledge and awareness of the all-knowing Creator of heaven and earth by blindfolding him? While it sounds rather silly when you put it that way, our sinful minds can style the concept to make it sound rather believable. Once again human experience works against the truth of God's Word here. Even children learn at a very young age that if they cannot hide their transgressions from their parents – they actually get caught - they can often blind their parents to the infraction, or to the greater problem. That is why parents are sometimes the very last to recognize the evil nature of the actions of their own children. Kids learn to just butter on the charm and the hypocritical flattery, and mom and dad simply melt away. Adults do it too. Husbands imagine they can make despicable behavior disappear behind a bouquet of flowers. Wives bury their offense under a big old plate of their big, strong, handsome husband's favorite meal.

You get the point: our experience tells us that others (especially loved ones) can be blinded to our faults. Somehow we come to believe that God, who sees all, can also be blinded to the faults that he sees in us. How do we create such a ridiculous illusion? By imagining that we can turn our charm on God himself and thereby manipulate him and his righteous judgments. We do so whenever we imagine that church attendance, contributions, deeds of kindness or charity, volunteer help, and the like, will make God overlook all the bad things we've done. All of these things can in fact be pleasing to God, but only when they are carried out as acts of praise and thanksgiving to a God who has rescued us from a certain eternity in hell. How contemptible, how evil, to try to hide or justify sin by trying, in effect, to bribe God.

What then are we supposed to do with this information? Is there any way, for example, to turn this lie of Satan to our advantage? While it is certainly a lie that sin is only wrong if someone sees it, it can and ought to be a matter of great joy and comfort for Christians that our God does, in fact, see all things.

We human beings generally possess a common fear or apprehension that if those around us actually *knew* what we were really like on the inside, they would probably like us a whole lot less – if they liked us at all. If my friend, for example, knew about every evil thought, word, and deed, I wonder if he would even be my friend. While this fear could actually have some merit when dealing with our friends and neighbors, we need have no such fear concerning our relationship with our Savior God. What a profound comfort it ought to be for every Christian to

know that God *does* know absolutely everything there is to know about me. Nothing that I have ever said or thought or done or felt has ever been hidden from God, who sees all. Yet he loves me anyway. There is no need for secrecy or pretense when we deal with our Lord, for our Lord knows the good, the bad, and the downright ugly about us. He knows that "the good" in us does not exist apart from him. He has seen "the bad" – every bit of evil that we have done – and he even knows about "the ugly." He knows the evil thoughts and deeds we don't even care to admit to ourselves. All this Jesus knew full well before he ever walked to the cross for us, and yet he did it anyway. Jesus is fully aware of all of our perversions even today, and yet it was for sinners like us that he gave his life. He knows how hypocritical and unreliable we can be, and yet he continues to love us with a holy, unfailing love. He knows how truly thankless we can be, and still he speaks to the Father moment by moment in our defense. Praise God for such a Savior.

So it is that we find ourselves hoping that God *does* see absolutely everything that is in our hearts. Why? Because it is no longer our sin that can condemn us. Jesus paid that bill in full. We are now saved by faith in Jesus Christ – and that is what God now sees when he looks at us. Far from cowering from his sight, we can and should stand boldly in his presence – all because of what he has done. Our Savior God paid for our sins. He then, through God the Holy Spirit, brought us to faith and preserves us in that faith. That's what God now sees, and it is the best of all possible news as far as Christians are concerned.

The devil would have you believe that you can hide your sins from God, or that you can blind your God to those sins by "doing good." Know instead the facts of Life: Jesus, knowing every bit of our wickedness – knowing us better than we know ourselves – chose to love us and to give his life to redeem us from the torments of hell. What God therefore now sees when he looks at us is the saving faith that he himself created, and therefore he sees every single Christian as a perfect heir of heaven. Let this great *truth* fill your heart during this Lenten season, and every moment thereafter. Amen.

## Scripture Readings

<sup>ESV</sup> **Deuteronomy 26:5-10** "And you shall make response before the LORD your God, 'A wandering Aramean was my father. And he went down into Egypt and sojourned there, few in number, and there he became a nation, great, mighty, and populous. <sup>6</sup> And the Egyptians treated us harshly and humiliated us and laid on us hard labor. <sup>7</sup> Then we cried to the LORD, the God of our fathers, and the LORD heard our voice and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression. <sup>8</sup> And the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great deeds of terror, with signs and wonders. <sup>9</sup> And he brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. <sup>10</sup> And behold, now I bring the first of the fruit of the ground, which you, O LORD, have given me.' And you shall set it down before the LORD your God and worship before the LORD your God.

<sup>ESV</sup> **Luke 4:1-13** And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness <sup>2</sup> for forty days, being tempted by the devil. And he ate nothing during those days. And when they were ended, he was hungry. <sup>3</sup> The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread." <sup>4</sup> And Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone.'" <sup>5</sup> And the devil took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time, <sup>6</sup> and said to him, "To you I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will. <sup>7</sup> If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours." <sup>8</sup> And Jesus answered him, "It is written, "'You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve.'" <sup>9</sup> And he took him to Jerusalem and set him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, <sup>10</sup> for it is written, "'He will command his angels concerning you, to guard you,'" <sup>11</sup> and "'On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.'" <sup>12</sup> And Jesus answered him, "It is said, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'" <sup>13</sup> And when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time.

# ST. PAUL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

2510 E. Divide Ave. Bismarck, ND 58501

Parsonage and Office: (701) 223-4885 Cell: (701) 425-5483

Website: [www.bismarcklutheran.org](http://www.bismarcklutheran.org)

Mark Johnson, President Angela Pfennig, Organist

Michael Roehl, Pastor

**The First Sunday in Lent – March 10, 2019**

## The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

## The Opening Hymn – 148 (Stanzas 1-6) (Red Hymnal)

"Lord Jesus Christ, My Life, My Light"

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

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

**The First Lesson:** (Deuteronomy 26:5-10) Our Old Testament Lesson speaks of the origin of the Jewish Offering of Firstfruits. Since the Lord has also brought each of us out of the bondage of sin, through the death of Jesus Christ, we also now bring our "firstfruits" to our Lord each week in thanksgiving. God would have us regard giving as a privilege and as a token of our gratitude, not as an oppressive command.

## The Psalm of the Day – Psalm 85 (Supplement Page 40)

**The Second Lesson:** (Luke 4:1-13) We can learn much from Jesus' temptation in the wilderness. We learn to expect half-truths from the devil; we learn to combat temptation with the Word of God alone; and we learn that we do not *have to* sin. God through his Holy Spirit offers us help in times of trouble to overcome all temptation. God grant each of us the wisdom to seek that help in the Word of God, and to fight the fire of temptation with the fire of his Word.

## The Confession of Faith -

The Nicene Creed – page 5. (Brown Hymnal)

## The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 723 (Brown Hymnal)

"What Wondrous Love Is This?"

## The Sermon – Text: Luke 22:52-53 (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

**"It's Not Wrong if No One Sees"**

## The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

## The Prayers of the Day, Followed by the Lord's Prayer

## The Pre-Communion Hymn – 144 (Stanzas 1-4) Red Hymnal)

"Jesus, Grant that Balm and Healing"

## The Preparation for Holy Communion (Brown Hymnal page 17)

## The Distribution

## The Nunc Dimittis and Thanksgiving (Brown Hymnal page 20)

## The Benediction

## The Closing Hymn – 144 (Stanza 5) Red Hymnal)

"Jesus, Grant that Balm and Healing"

## 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 (26) Average (34) Wednesday (22)

### This Week at St. Paul:

|                    |                    |                                  |
|--------------------|--------------------|----------------------------------|
| <b>Today</b>       | <b>-9:00 a.m.</b>  | – Sunday school and Bible Class  |
|                    | <b>-10:00 a.m.</b> | – Worship Service w/communion    |
|                    | <b>-11:15 a.m.</b> | – Fellowship and coffee hour     |
| <b>Wednesday</b>   | <b>-5:45 p.m.</b>  | – Confirmation Class             |
|                    | <b>-7:00 p.m.</b>  | – Midweek Lenten Service         |
| <b>Next Sunday</b> | <b>-9:00 a.m.</b>  | – Sunday school (No Bible Class) |
|                    | <b>-10:00 a.m.</b> | – Sunday Worship Service         |
|                    | <b>-11:00 a.m.</b> | – Fellowship and coffee hour     |

**CLC News** – St John's of Okabena has called Teacher Andrew Roehl. Faith of Markesan has called Teacher Neil Bernthal. Professor Emeritus Ronald Roehl passed away rather unexpectedly late Friday night due to complications from pancreatic cancer. The funeral is scheduled for 11:00AM on Saturday, March 16, in Eau Claire.

**Council Meeting Notes** – All six members of the Council, plus the Pastor, were present for the March 3 meeting. Treasurer Mantz reported that income fell short of budgeted needs by \$75 in February, but that we are ahead of YTD needs by \$214. The Council continues to fine-tune the guidelines for our new Benevolent Fund and the updated Wedding Policies. The next Council meeting is scheduled for Thursday, April 4 at 7pm.

**Pastor Out of Town** – Pastor and Sandy plan to leave for Eau Claire on Thursday of this week to attend the funeral of Pastor's father. As a result, there will be Sunday school but no Bible Class next Sunday. Our midweek Lenten schedule remains unchanged, with Confirmation at 5:45pm and our Midweek Lenten service at 7pm.

**Easter Flowers** – There is a sign-up sheet on the mailbox table for all who would like to order Easter flowers again this year. The flowers will be used to decorate the church on Easter Sunday.