

"Trained to See"

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 absolutely amazing how often we don't "see" what we are seeing. This is true both physically and spiritually. Men tend to get this, because we spend an inordinate amount of time looking for things that are hiding in plain sight – only to have our wives walk over, grab something right in front of us, and ask, *"Is this what you were looking for?"*

The reason, so we are told, is distraction and lack of focus. A cluttered mind has a hard time focusing. All of us tend to miss even dramatic changes that happen right in front of us if we are not particularly interested or, more importantly, if we are focused on or preoccupied with something else.

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 certainly knows our human limitations. He knows that if we are focused on the trivial we will often miss what is actually important. He knows that if we are constantly focused on the material, we will most often miss the spiritual. Knowing this, expect your great Enemy to attempt to fill your world with so many eye-catching distractions that you miss what he doesn't want you to see.

Our text for this morning offers us training that can counteract the devil's plan. We can, in fact, be trained to "see" what we are actually seeing. To use the seemingly contradictory terminology of our text, we can learn to *"look to (and see) the unseen."* We can, in other words, be *"Trained to See."*

The text by which God the Holy Spirit will train, instruct, and comfort us 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.

This is *God's* word. It is therefore altogether true and right in every way. Resolve then to meditate on these words - to *focus* on them – accordingly. To prepare our hearts for such an appropriate and beneficial pursuit, 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 of reading and studying God's Word right away, which means that 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 when we stick with it, we gradually begin to recognize the obvious benefits. We begin to see the unseen. We 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 tools – 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, to see past the distractions, and to see the unseen. It is in God's Word that we are trained to see what would otherwise remain hidden.

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 section of your Bible, that Word continually addresses the changing circumstances of your life. You

can read a part 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.

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? It's there. Did you see it, or did it remain hidden – unseen?

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 from God 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? The devil must have been fairly *screaming* at him: *"Look at what you can so obviously see! What you are doing obviously isn't working! Stop already!"*

Paul had only one reason to carry on, which he revealed in our text for this morning. Again, did you "see" it? If you missed it, don't. It is critical, monumental, life-changing. The Holy Spirit's unseen truth: ***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.***

"It's all about God" is infinitely more than just a slogan. It expresses an insight that, once realized and accepted, will change the way we see life. Even in the saving of souls the *ultimate* focus was and is not the individual sinner but on the God that saves 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, the more God is glorified. Every human being that is saved will stand for all time as a testament to God's grace. Nearly all of what Paul could see with his eyes told him to quit. It was only the unseen truth of God that spoke differently.

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 inherits 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 simple truth. It's right there, but they will never "see" it. They are too distracted, too self-absorbed, too important in their own eyes. They will never see things as Christians do – which brings us to that rather amazing encouragement to ***"look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen."***

If you haven't already, pause for a moment and consider what we are here told to do. We are told to see what *is unseen*.

On the face of it those words sound nonsensical – *"to look to the unseen."* 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 trained by God's Word to see that which remains *unseen* to the unbelieving world.

For Paul to continue to preach Christ crucified in the face of incredible hardship and persecution – for that matter for *anyone at all to remain Christian in the hostile environment that is planet earth* – for that to happen Paul had to be rock solid sure that the opposition he was facing was of Satan and not of God. That sort of confidence and certainty can only be the result of a rock-solid belief in the unseen reality of the message he 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 path of least resistance. Today that path of least resistance is parroting the nonsense that one religion is as good as any other. The path of least resistance is 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 life? So also God's Word teaches us that there is only one way for man to be saved, which is to trust not in ourselves and our own goodness, but in the payment Jesus made for us – which alone can and has removed our sin. That truth, that reality, is “unseen.” Thank God that you’ve nonetheless been trained to see it.

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 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."***

Man has no real excuse for denying the existence or reality of the unseen. There are countless things in our lives that are unseen, yet even 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 truths? Watch a child

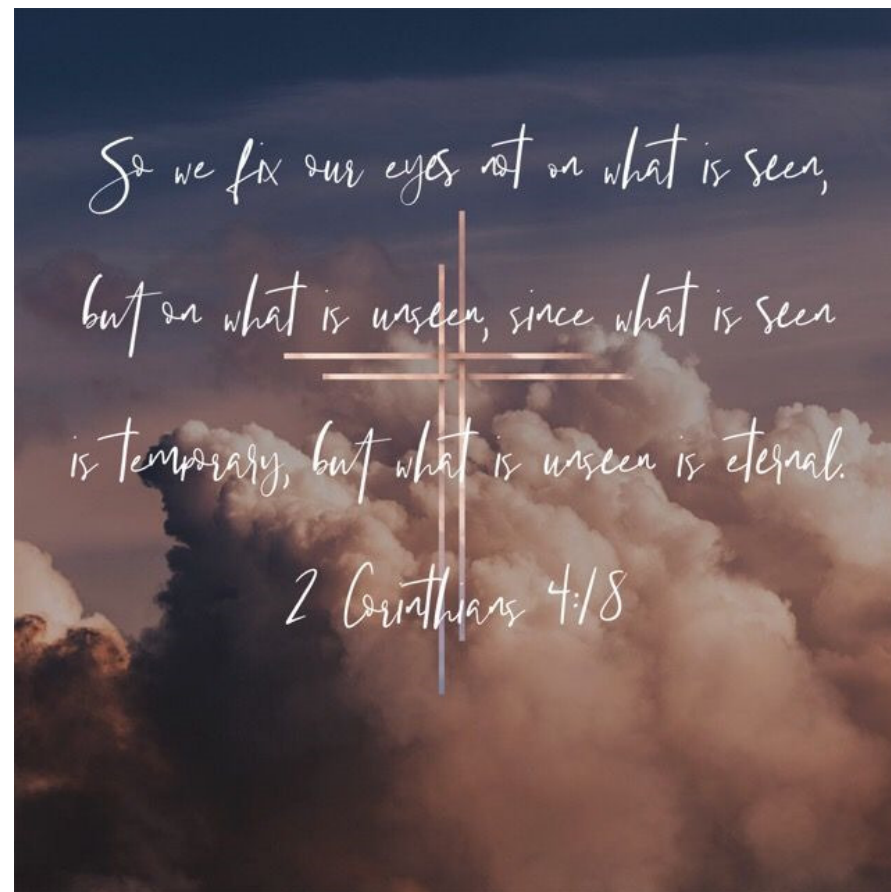
being baptized in the name of the Triune God and Christians see the reality of a miracle of rebirth. The world sees only water being poured on a baby's head. Go to the Lord's Table and you recognize the unseen reality that you there receive Christ's true body and blood. The world sees only bread and wine. This sort of miraculous unseen truth is all around us every day. If we but learn to look with trained, educated eyes 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 trained to see the unseen, that all of us may continue to see and believe the reality of life and forgiveness as God himself has revealed it to us. Amen.

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 9, 2024

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 First Lesson: (Genesis 3:8-15) Who was hurt by Adam and Eve's sin? The godless would say no one, yet clearly the damage was both substantial and terrible. 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.

The Psalm of the Day – Psalm 96 (Supplement page 26)

The Second 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 warned us that when that house is "divided" by discord it cannot stand. He also here reaffirms his love for those who believe in him – regarding them (us) as just as precious as his own mother and brothers.

The Confession of Faith -

The Apostolic Creed (Supplement page 15)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 742 (Brown Hymnal)

"Praise, My Soul, the King of Heaven"

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

"Trained to See"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Post-Sermon Hymn – 794 (Brown Hymnal)

"Jerusalem, Jerusalem"

The Prayers

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 and around the world. 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 (23) Average (42)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour
Wednesday	-6:00 p.m.	– Church Council Meeting
Next Sunday	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service w/Holy Communion
	-11:30 a.m.	– Fellowship Meal

CLC News – Teacher Andrew Roehl has returned the call to Luther Memorial of Fond du Lac. Mr. Mark Wales has accepted the teaching call to Holy Trinity of West Columbia. Pastor Sam Rodebaugh is considering the call to Grace of Sleepy Eye. Mr. Darin Lau is considering the teaching call to Messiah of Eau Claire.

Confirmation Sunday and June Communion Schedule –

Confirmation Sunday is scheduled for next Sunday, June 16th. A fellowship meal is planned for after the service. Since we historically have celebrated Holy Communion on Confirmation Sunday, and because the CLC Convention later this month will require Pastor Roehl to be gone on the 4th Sunday of the month, Holy Communion will be celebrated in June next Sunday (the 16th) and then again on June 30th.

Lutheran Spokesman and Daily Rest Renewal – Subscriptions for both the Lutheran Spokesman and Daily Rest are now due. See the sign-up sheets on the mailbox table for more information. Please consider subscribing, both for yourself and as a gift.

Women's Fellowship and Church Council Meetings – The Church Council is scheduled to meet on Wednesday of this week and the Women's Fellowship on Sunday, June 23rd.