

March 15 Worship
4th Sunday In Lent
Reader- Gary Fleming

Announcements/Joys

Time Of Quiet Meditation- *“The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shined.”*

Isaiah 9:2

Opening Scripture- Psalm 23(page 476)

Opening Chorus- 454- He Leadeth Me, O Blessed Thought(verse 1)

Responsive Call To Worship-

Leader: Day by day, God leads us: to the deep, deep pools of peace.

People: To the green, lush lawns of grace.

Leader: Day by day, Jesus calls us: to pour out ourselves in service.

People: To anoint the stranger with hope.

Leader: Day by day, the Holy Spirit shows us.

People: The community we could be and the family we are called to become.

Hymn of Praise- 24- Praise To The Lord, The Almighty

Unison Prayer/Lord's Prayer- Loving Shepherd, you know our names; you care for us. When we face darkness and death, walk beside us. When we hunger for your love, fill us with your presence. When we are fearful, feed us at your table. May we dwell in the house of goodness and mercy all the days of our lives. We pray as our Savior taught us, saying... *Lord's Prayer...*

“Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.”

Gloria Patri- 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. World without end.
Amen, Amen.

Old Testament Scripture- 1 Samuel 16:1-13(page 248)

Special Music-

Gospel Scripture- John 9:1-17(page 932-933)

Children's Time/Echo Prayer/Passing of the Peace

Hymn- 542- Savior, Like A Shepherd Lead Us

New Testament Scripture- Ephesians 5:8-14(page 1019-1020)

Message

“Seeing Through The Darkness”

God created us and gave us 5 human senses that are important for our survival; seeing, hearing, touch, smell and taste. There are those individuals who, for whatever reason, have either completely or partially lost one or more senses. While it is possible to live without our physical senses, they each have an important function in our lives. Which of the five senses would you consider to be the most necessary or essential in your life? There are two of our senses which are considered to be distance senses, hearing and seeing. The others are based more on what happens to us right here in our bodies. Seeing and hearing depend on things that can happen at a distance while feeling, tasting and smelling require up close and personal contact.

It is a personal choice as to which sense is most valuable to each of us. For most, seeing seems to be the main choice for which sense is most valuable. The Holy Bible has the word seeing 481 times and the word sight 566 times. Sight, as a concept in the Bible, encompasses both the physical ability to see and the spiritual insight or understanding granted by God. It is a recurring theme throughout Scripture, symbolizing knowledge, revelation, and divine guidance. The Bible frequently references physical sight as a gift from God, integral to human experience. In Genesis 1:31, God observes His creation and declares it "very good," indicating the importance of sight in perceiving and appreciating the world. The healing of physical blindness is a significant aspect of Jesus' ministry, demonstrating His compassion and divine authority. In our gospel reading this morning, Jesus heals a man born blind, illustrating His power to restore physical sight and, symbolically, spiritual insight.

Spiritual sight, or insight, is a deeper understanding and perception of God's truth. It is often contrasted with spiritual blindness, which denotes a lack of understanding or refusal to accept divine truth. In Matthew 13:13-16, Jesus explains that some people "see but do not see" because their hearts are hardened. Spiritual

sight is a gift from God, enabling believers to comprehend His will and purpose. Ephesians 1:18 speaks of having "the eyes of your heart enlightened" to know the hope of God's calling. Sight is closely linked to faith in the Bible. Hebrews 11:1 defines faith as "the assurance of what we hope for and the certainty of what we do not see." Believers are called to walk by faith, not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7), trusting in God's promises even when they are not visible. This reliance on faith over physical sight underscores the importance of spiritual perception in the Christian life. God's sight is perfect and all-encompassing. Proverbs 15:3 states, "The eyes of the LORD are in every place, observing the evil and the good." God's omniscience assures believers that nothing escapes His notice, and His judgments are always just. In 1 Samuel 16:7, God reminds Samuel that "man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart," emphasizing His ability to see beyond the superficial.

We all know that our ability to see can be diminished or hampered by outside influences. Smoke, fog, or darkness makes it difficult if not impossible to see very far at times. How about our spiritual ability to see? What can obscure or cloud our spiritual ability to understand or comprehend God's Word? In many ways, seeing can be said to mean understanding. Whenever someone tries to explain something to us we usually respond by saying "I see." There are so many different things that can confuse our understanding of God's will. What is going on in the world on a daily basis is more than hard to understand. How can we see or understand God's purpose while there is so much cruelty and hardship around us?

We can't seem to wrap our heads around why God would allow such misery to envelop those who He claims to love. If you are a parent, you will find it easier to understand. How many times have we watched our children do things that we know will harm them and we cannot stop them? How many times did our parents watch us get way to close to the edge and they were powerless to stop us? God does not allow things to happen because He doesn't love us, He allows it because He does love us. He loves us so much that we are allowed the chance to learn from our mistakes or we can keep making them over and over until we do learn. The problem is not that God makes the problems or that He allows bad things to happen. The problem is that humanity has not yet learned that God's way is the right way.

When we see what is going on in this world, we tend to look through the eyes of a people who don't expect anything good to come about because we are placing our faith in human decision making. If, and this is a very big if, we stop and look teal hard at what God is trying to show us, all of this foolishness will cease and we will discover and understand, yes we will see, that God knows what is best for us. Why is so hard for us to see the promises that God has made to us? There are times, actually most of the time, when we, as humans, are so stubborn and self centered

that we refuse to see beyond our own noses to the glory that God is willing to bless us with. This stubbornness and self centeredness should be taken as a form of blindness that afflicts us when we fail to open ourselves to God's healing power.

As we read the gospel lesson about Jesus healing the blind man, we accept it as a good lesson about how Jesus did His miracles. What we fail to take into consideration is that Jesus can and will perform this very same miracle on each one of us if we simply acknowledge that we are just as blind as the man in the story. He was physically blind from birth, we are spiritually blind because we refuse to see. We refuse to see the power that exists within God's grace. Accepting Jesus and allowing the Holy Spirit access to our lives will open our eyes and allow us to truly see just what God has in mind for us. We can go through our entire lives claiming to believe in God and saying that we know all about Jesus. Is that really enough? Satan himself knows who Jesus is and believes in Him. How many people do we know who say the same thing. How many of us say it. Knowing Jesus and truly seeing and understanding Him is far beyond simply believing. I can believe that there is a glorious sunrise every morning without ever seeing one. We can go through our entire lives believing in Jesus and never see or understand His glory. Let Jesus restore your sight, today. Praise Be to God. Amen.

Prayers of the People- Holy Jesus, we confess that we fail to question our own sightlessness. Being so sure that we “see,” we miss the truths you would teach us. With the poultice of your love, cure this blindness. Open our eyes to our own misunderstandings, our own failures and our own faults. Make our “shadow side” known to us and help us to diminish it with the light of your grace. For it is only when we see ourselves clearly that we can worship you truly. Patient Lord, forgive our lack of faith in your loving power. We look around us and all that we see is what we don’t have. We fail to notice the daily blessings you lavish upon us. Clear our blindness to the needs of others. Strengthen us and move us from lame excuses for not serving you. Help us to truly listen to one another, not with our pat answers ready, but with loving and generous hearts. Heal us and make us ready to truly be your disciples. In Jesus’ Name, we pray. Amen.

Closing Hymn- 497- Just As I Am Without One Plea

Benediction- Go in peace and love and care for another in the name of the Lord; and may God lead you to places of rest and renewal; may Christ Jesus give you life in abundance; and may the Holy Spirit fill your hearts with gladness and generosity, both now and forevermore. Amen.