



Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

www.mzluth.org

February 24, 2008

3rd Sunday in Lent

Isaiah 42:14-21

Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: Isaiah 42:14-21

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 143

Second Lesson: Ephesians 5:8-14

Gospel: John 9:1-7, 13-17, 34-39

For the Sake of His Righteousness

We do what we do for a lot of different reasons, don't we? If you go to work during the week, why do you do what you are supposed to do at work? Is it because you really love your boss and you want to see him smile, or is it so you can get a paycheck at the end of the week (or two weeks)? Your neighbor asks for some help in doing whatever, do you help him because he is a great and wonderful guy or because he helped you the fall before when you needed some help? Your parents tell you to pick up your room, do you do it because you dearly love your parents and want to see that glow on their face when you actually listen and do what they say, or are you worried you won't get to go to town and get the treats or go shopping or do whatever it is they said you were going to do later in the day?

We have a lot of different competing motivations in our daily life, don't we? There are times that you and I do the right things for the right reasons. There are also times when you and I do the right things because we feel we have to and it isn't necessarily the right reason why we are doing it, right? We do things because we feel we are obligated to do so and we might not want to do it. Sometimes we may do things at times so we can get something out of someone else. I think we all can see that and can acknowledge that in our lives. I think one of the differences comes when we try to ascribe to God some of those same motivations that we have.

Have you ever in your life thought "God, I am going to do this for you—now I am hoping you will do this for me." Have you ever tried to manipulate God? Maybe you gave an extra gift to the Lord or you served the Lord in some way, shape or form and now maybe God will do something back for you and that was what motivated you to do it? Or maybe you think that is how you can manipulate God to do something for you? I think in the infancy of our faith we do that at times.

This morning our God reminds us of something very clearly—God will do great things for us. He will do unbelievable things for us that he describes in this picture of blindness and sight and darkness and light in the reading from Isaiah. But he does it for only one reason and if we want to ascribe God's action to any other reason when he blesses us, we are missing the point, we are kidding ourselves, and we are giving the devil a foothold. It's for the sake of His righteousness that God does these things and for the sake of His righteousness alone. That means because he is a holy and just and loving God, he does what he does. He calls the blind. He leads the blind to the light. He

gives us forgiveness and salvation—not because of us, but only because of him. That’s what our God wants us to see crystal clearly this morning, we who were blind but now have received sight.

That imagery of blindness—look at what God says. *“Hear, you deaf; look, you blind, and see!”* Then he describes for us who he is talking about through Isaiah. *“Who is blind but my servant, and deaf like the messenger I send? Who is blind like the one committed to me, blind like the servant of the LORD? You have seen many things, but have paid no attention; your ears are open, but you hear nothing.”* Those are the words of rebuke and admonition that God gives to his children. Here the servant of the LORD doesn’t mean the Savior as it often does in Isaiah. Here it means the servant of the Lord, the children of Israel, those he had called to be his special people, his chosen nation, the people that belonged to God that were his from among all the nations. They had seen many things. They had seen a lot of miracles in the deliverance from Egypt. They had seen a lot of miracles through the prophets, through Elijah, through Elisha; they were going to see all kinds of things, but they weren’t going to understand at times. Their ears were going to hear great things from the prophets, but they didn’t always pay attention. He is rebuking them because they had every advantage in the world and yet they remained blind. They remained deaf, and he is desperately pleading with them to turn away from that and see and hear because he wanted to do great things for them. He even says, “You know what? I have seen all these things that you have been doing and I have held myself back. It’s not that I have been silent because I haven’t noticed.” Kind of like kids in school—they think sometimes the teacher doesn’t see what they are doing. In reality, the teacher sees and just doesn’t think it is worth dealing with right then at that time. Kids think they are getting away with all kinds of stuff. Just wait some day if you ever stand in front of a classroom and see all the things that you thought you were getting away with. It’s kind of eye opening.

God says, “I see it. I’ve held myself back. I’ve held myself back for a purpose because I’ve sent prophet after prophet to you. I’ve done this. I’ve done that. But now the time has come and like a woman in childbirth, I’m not holding myself back anymore. I am going to cry out. I am going to gasp. I am going to pant. I am going to act! I am going to do what needs to be done so that you blind will see.”

The blind isn’t just the children of Israel. It’s also us, isn’t it? Think of every advantage that we have had. As Christians, we know the end of the story. The people he was talking to didn’t know how God was going to take away their sins. They knew nothing about the intricate details that we know of salvation. They didn’t know about the Upper Room. They didn’t know that the Passover was just a foreshadowing of Christ’s body and blood that we receive today. They didn’t know about the cross and the empty tomb. They had various pictures of it, but they didn’t know the whole story. You and I know the whole story. We’ve seen the cross. We’ve seen the empty tomb. We’ve been led by the Spirit of God to believe that Jesus has taken away our sins. We have the fulfillment of all the promises. Yet, think of how often you and I see but don’t understand or have ears that are open but don’t hear. Think of how often you and I go through our daily lives and we seem to think God is distant and not near by. We seem to think that maybe God has deserted us. We seem to think “God, thank you for this blessing, but why aren’t you giving me that blessing?” We think “God, you do all things

well, but here is one thing you could do a little better in my life for me.” Sometimes we doubt God. Sometimes we question God. Sometimes God says to us “You can do all things through Him who gives you strength” and we say “No, I can’t. Here am I, Lord, call him or call her, but I can’t serve you because I just don’t have that ability.”

We hear God’s promises, but we don’t always live them. That is why God calls us through his gospel. He called us at our baptisms and washed away our sins and clothed us with Jesus’ righteousness. He calls us day after day through the Word. He calls us this morning through his body and blood. He calls us to come to the light and see the forgiveness our Savior has won for us. Look at what he says, *“I will lead the blind by ways they have not known, along unfamiliar paths I will guide them; I will turn the darkness into light before them and make the rough places smooth. These are the things I will do; I will not forsake them.”* That says he is going to “make the rough places smooth.” He isn’t just talking about potholes that come from the winter driving. He is talking about the rough spots in our lives—the sin. Things that you and I do to ignore God, to deny God, to question God—he is going to make those rough spots that we who should know better do day after day, smooth. He is going to forgive them because he is going to send the Savior to live in our place and die in our place to give us His perfection so that when God looks at us, he doesn’t see all those bumps and potholes of our lives. Instead he sees the perfection of Jesus Christ. He has done that for us. He has made the darkness light. He has led us into the light of his love and his forgiveness and now when he looks at us, he doesn’t see those things anymore. This is what our God has done. He does it, not because we tried hard, not because we earned it, not because we are good looking, he does it because he is God, for the sake of his righteousness. He does it because that is the nature of God.

So you and I don’t have to try to manipulate God. You and I don’t have to coerce God into blessing us. You and I can sit back and marvel that God does bless us day after day. His mercies are new to us every morning (like we learned at the end of Bible study this morning). God’s compassions are there for us day after day. You and I don’t have to try to earn it or deserve it. We immerse ourselves in it. We rejoice in it. We live in it day after day and then that moves us to say “Here am I. Send me Lord. Open my eyes so I see the opportunities to serve you. Give me eyes that see ways I can share your gospel. Give me eyes to see ways that I can encourage those who are weak and so I can bring back those who are straying. Give me ears that hear, in the people I talk with, their pain and their hurt, and then give me lips that speak of your love and your mercy and your forgiveness.”

God is going to lead people to the light and he is going to call the blind through you and me. This is the incredible truth of our God. He uses people like you and me who have failed him. You and I, we do not serve him perfectly, yet when we are weak, he is strong, and he enables us to do what we could not do on our own. In the light of his gospel, not only do we find forgiveness, but we find a power that passes all understanding so that we, for the sake of His righteousness, serve him faithfully day after day.

So, when Mom or Dad ask you to clean your room, or the boss asks you to do something, maybe this week we can just remember for the sake of God's righteousness, "I am going to do it and trust that God will help me to do more than I think I can."