

Third Sunday after the Epiphany – 2025
Nehemiah 8:1-3, 5-6, 8-10
1 Corinthians 12:12-31a
Luke 4:16-30

I am of the mind that God created us in the way that He did for a reason that goes well beyond mere function. God knows everything, sees everything, anticipates everything, right? When God created us to have blood that courses through our body He also knew that His Son would redeem the world by His sacrifice, right? The Almighty had the full architectural design of man's redemption *before* He created Adam from the dust of the earth, right? I'm not trying to send you on a mindbender, but I am attempting to get you to consider how your physicality and our faith align, how your physicality and God's plan, God's work of salvation align. Leviticus tells us that the life of a creature is in the blood. "For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life" (Leviticus 17:11). God made us to have blood *because* He planned for His Son to give His life for you, to redeem you by His sacrifice, to offer His invaluable life for the salvation of the world.

How about eyes? Eyes are very much in focus today. Faith and eyes – do they go together? Did God give us eyes *because* He intended to breathe faith into us? Your eyes see – some better than others. It's good to see, isn't it? Life magazine ran a cover in 1952 of an audience viewing a 3-D movie. Everyone is wearing the special glasses. The men, by the way, were all in a suit and tie and the women were wearing formal dresses and many of them were wearing furs. Here's how the 3D glasses work: Each eye receives a different image because the glasses filter light differently for each eye which then creates the illusion of depth. This depth on the screen isn't really there, obviously, but by the way that the light is filtered for each eye the brain is tricked. Each eye has a different filter and thus perceives a different image and the brain makes sense of these competing stimuli by fabricating depth to the pictures. People in the audience couldn't see the depth without the glasses. The real question today is, what do the eyes of your heart see? (Ephesians 1:18). "Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see" (Hebrews 11:1). There's a line in one of our hymns that puts it this way: "Though the eye of sinful man Thy glory may not see" (Holy, Holy, Holy – LSB#507).

Let's carry this a little further. Jesus enters Jerusalem and is dismayed because unbelief, blindness, is rampant. He laments: "Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes" (Luke 19:42). The climax of the Gospel of Luke has two ole boys walking from Jerusalem to Emmaus and the Lord Christ joins them "on the way." It's Easter, and at the beginning of this episode Luke tells us that "their eyes were kept from recognizing him" (Luke 24:16). But at the right time, when Jesus is at table with them, as He takes bread, blesses it, breaks it, and begins to give it to them "their eyes were opened, and they recognize him" (Luke 24:31). Faith is perceiving what is genuinely there to be perceived. The Roman centurion who crucified Jesus, when the Lord died and the earth quaked, he and those with him were filled with awe and said, "Truly this was the Son of God!" (Matthew 27:54). What did the eyes of the centurion's heart perceive that the Pharisees did not?

Jesus comes to Nazareth for the express purpose of reading Isaiah 61 in the synagogue. The ancient Israelites had a lectionary just like we do, prescribed readings for each Sabbath day, and Jesus knew that Isaiah 61 was in the chute. It is a messianic passage, a reference to Jubilee, an OT feast that happened only once every fifty years (Leviticus 25). During Jubilee debts were forgiven, slaves were liberated, people returned to their homes – it was the year of the Lord's favor. Jubilee! It pointed to Christ and Jesus was going to His hometown to tell them that He is the One. Jesus goes to His hometown to tell them that the messianic era of salvation begins now, begins in Him. "The Spirit of the Lord is on me" (Luke 4:18). Those are the first words of the public ministry of the Son of God in the Gospel According to Luke. It's a Trinitarian reference – the Spirit of the Lord is on me. All of this fabulous passage from Isaiah is read by the One who fulfills Jubilee. "He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Luke 4:18-20). Jesus finishes reading, rolls up the scroll, gives it back to the attendant and, as was custom for a rabbi, He sits down. Then Luke tells us this: "The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him" (Luke 4:20).

What would they see? Is it really physical vision? Is it really about mere attentiveness? Would they trust the eyes of their heart? Would the eyes of their hearts be enlightened to see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 4:6)? What about you? What do you see when you look at Christ's church? Do you see the glory of God? Do you see the power of the Word unleashed into the lives of broken people, a Word that brings hope, brings wholeness, brings forgiveness, life, and salvation? What do the eyes of your heart see when the pastor holds out to you the unleavened bread of the Eucharist? Do you see Christ's love, His sacrifice, His promise, His presence? God made you to have eyes *because* He wills you to walk by faith (2 Corinthians 5:7). Faith sees that which is hidden, but present. When you see the pastor stand before the congregation and pronounce Christ's absolution, what do the eyes of your heart see? Do you see Christ's commission, His command in, with, and under the servant of the Word? When you see someone being baptized, what do the eyes of your heart see? Do you see Christ's blood in the water (Revelation 7:14)? Do you see death and resurrection? When you see someone in need, do the eyes of your heart see Christ? He said, as much as you do it for the least of these, my brethren, you do it for me (Matthew 25:40).

Sadly, sometimes we don't want to see what is there for the eyes of our hearts to see. We distance ourselves from God's promises. We trust only what the eyes in our heads perceive. Jesus announced the wonder of God's fulfillment: "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:21). And listen to their response: "Is not this Joseph's son?" (Luke 4:22). Do you know what that is? That is a people who are determined not to perceive, not to see, not to trust the eyes of their heart. Is not this Joseph's son? That is a people who are trying to convince themselves that Jesus, the Son of God, is just a man. Do you see that out there, in the culture? It leads nowhere. We can never take the eyes of our hearts for granted. That's simply another way of saying that we can never take our faith for granted. Feed it, nurture it, protect it; if you don't then that blind idea will creep in "Is not this Joseph's son?"

Today the Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing. When Jesus visited Zacchaeus' house He said: "Today salvation has come to this house" (Luke 19:10). When the penitent thief prayed that Jesus would remember him when the Lord came into His kingdom, Jesus said: "Truly, I say to

you, today you will be with me in Paradise” (Luke 23:43). When Jesus was born and the angels streamed from on high to proclaim the Good News, they said: “Today, in the city of David, there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:11). Today the crucified and risen Savior is present among us, bringing His kingdom, fulfilling the Scripture, opening the eyes of our hearts to see the beauty of His work. “Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation” (2 Corinthians 6:2). “Blessed are the eyes that see what you see” (Luke 10:23). After you commune today, as you sing Simeon’s Song, the Nunc Dimittis, consider all that the eyes of your heart see and thank God for showing you the marvel of His Son, thank God for showing you the ongoing ministry of Christ the King.