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Lent 2 Midweek

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Vision Problems: Near-sightedness”

Text: Hebrews 12:1-17; Matthew 16:24-26; 26:14-16, 47-50a; 27:1-5

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

There are many and various theories about why Judas did what he did. The Scriptures don't tell us the why, just the what - what he did. That he betrayed Jesus.

But of all the theories I have heard, explanations of why Judas did what he did, the best, I think, boils down to this: that Judas did what he did because *he was near-sighted*. That was his vision problem.

Because of his near-sightedness, Judas came to the conclusion that Jesus was going about this Messiah gig all wrong. He wasn't doing it right. If He was going to establish a kingdom and be a Messiah, He was going to have to start acting like it! His teaching was nice and all, but it wasn't getting the job done. Hanging out with low lifes and poor people wasn't either. They weren't going to be of any help. Three years now and nothing had changed. There was kingdom, no movement, no talk of it even. Jesus wasn't stepping up. And a near-sighted Judas was growing impatient. So force His hand. Make Jesus do something.

So betray Jesus? No, I don't think Judas thought he was. Not at all. He was *helping* Jesus. Getting Him over the hump. Getting His Messiah-ball rolling. For once they come for Jesus, the soldiers and guards, He'll have to do *something*. He'll have to fight back. And the kingdom will begin . . . *now*.

Except it didn't. Judas' near-sightedness prevented him from seeing the big picture of what Jesus was doing and how He was doing it.

So Jesus is arrested. Jesus is bound. Jesus is mocked and abused. Jesus is put on trial. Jesus is condemned. Jesus is losing.

No, no, no, no, no! This isn't what was supposed to happen! Except it did. Judas got the ball rolling alright. But not the one he thought.

In despair, he tries to give the money back. Reverse course. Undo what he had done. What good is it if he *gains the whole world but forfeits his soul*? But they won't take it back. So he throws it back. Throws it at them. Throws it as far away from him as he can.

But it's not far enough. The stain is still there. On his heart. Near-sighted Judas cannot see even far enough to see that Jesus had come to take even that stain away. That sin. All sin. So, near-sightedly, there's only one way out for Judas. At the end of a rope.

Near-sightedness. That's our vision problem for tonight. When you can see things up close clearly, but things off in the distance are blurry and out of focus. And such vision can cause you to make bad decisions, when all you can see, all you consider is the here and now, the present, the imminent, and not what is coming, the future, how things might or will be different tomorrow.

Near-sightedness makes people run up large debts now and not save for the future, or think about how they will pay back those debts.

Near-sightedness makes people burn their bridges without thinking about how they might need them in the future.

Near-sightedness causes people to make bad life decisions, like suicide, or assisted suicide, or euthanasia, or abortion.

Near-sightedness thinks the now is all there is. The suffering isn't going to change. There's no way out.

Near-sightedness then also thinks wrongly about God. Like, when we think like Judas, that God isn't doing things right. Or that He isn't doing things quickly enough. No, no, no, no, no God! This isn't how my life was supposed to turn out! God's discipline feels like punishment when you're near-sighted. When all you're thinking about is the here and now; is *this* moment.

Thankfully, Jesus doesn't have that problem. He is not near-sighted like we tend to be. He disciplines us today for our good tomorrow. He trains us now for what we will need in the future. Luther once said that everything God is putting us through now, all the trials and troubles and struggles, is because He is preparing us for the biggest one we will face in the future: death. He is teaching us now for then. Jesus has the long-term in mind. For He sees clearly. Both now and the future.

And for Himself, that long-term good for us meant Him going to the cross then. It meant suffering now, mocking now, agony now, crucifixion now. And then resurrection, then ascension, then glory, then eternity. With you. For all that was for you. He had all that He needed. But you didn't. All you had was your now, and when that's gone, it's gone. Jesus came so that you could have now and a future. A future with Him. A future forever.

Near-sighted Judas couldn't see that; didn't get that. The other disciples probably didn't either. Not at first. Not until later. When after His resurrection, Jesus laid it all out for

them and corrected their vision using the Scriptures. Showing them the whole plan of and will of God. Judas never gave Jesus that chance. And many near-sighted people today don't either.

But the Scriptures are the glasses we need to see clearly both now and in the future. The Scriptures correct our vision. That what happened to Jesus really was the plan all along. That He did it right - it is we who did it wrong. From Adam and Eve down to today. That the discipline we experience now is to benefit us in the future. That God is love. That He is treating us as sons.

Without the Scriptures, we don't see right. We, like Judas, will take matters into our own hands without, perhaps, even realizing that we are betraying God! If it's going to be it's up to me!

No. The Scriptures teach us and show us that if it's going to be, it's because of Jesus. Because He is love, loving, and always working in love for you. And He knows what He's doing. He is gone to prepare a glorious place for you, and He is preparing you for that glorious future. Maybe it's tough for you right now. Maybe it's not exactly what you had in mind right now. Maybe you think He should be doing it differently. If so, repent, this Lenten season. And look to the cross. He's doing it right. He's doing it for you.

Look to the cross. Not in despair, like near-sighted Judas, but with tears of joy. That Jesus did that for you, so that wouldn't be you. So that for you would be resurrection and life.

And maybe knowing that, seeing clearly through the Scriptures, knowing the future that awaits us in Jesus, we can help those who are near-sighted now. Be their guides. Provide for them. Reassure them. Help them to see their Saviour. On the cross for them. Risen for them. With His forgiveness for them. And that just maybe a little cross now will mean a lot of glory later.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.