

18 March 2020  
Lent 3 Midweek

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

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“Vision Problems: Macular Degeneration”  
Text: Isaiah 43:8-13; John 11:45-53; 19:12-15

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

First of all, peace to you this night. The peace of Christ in the midst of confusion and uncertainty. The peace of our Lord in this time of instability, when things change so much from day to day. The peace of Jesus when there is no normal anymore; when our lives are turned upside down. Know that while we are surprised by the events and pronouncements and changes of each day, our Lord is not. He knows. And He's seen worse. He's seen His church through a lot worse than this. So He will see us through this as well. Which is not to say it will be easy. It won't. It already isn't! But don't lose heart. Don't lose your confidence in your Saviour!

Because what often happens in times like this, times when we see so much swirling around us and so much change, is that we fail to see what is right in front of us. There's an eye disease that does that too - it's called macular degeneration. What happens with that is you lose the ability to see what is right in front of you, while still being able to see peripherally - what is around you. I think that's a danger for us now, and I think that's what happened to the Jewish leaders.

As we heard in the reading from John, the Jewish leaders were living (like us) in a chaotic time. But it wasn't a virus that had upset things for them, but Jesus. And they were worried. Because looking at Jesus, they couldn't see Jesus for who He was - what was right in front of them - all they saw was all that was swirling about them. They saw people believing in Jesus and following Him. They saw the Romans growing concerned. They saw their own influence waning. And when Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead (which He did right before the reading we heard from John tonight), they couldn't see the power of God - they couldn't see God in the flesh, standing right before them! All they could see was all the trouble swirling about them. And it scared them. Everything was out of control.

Except it wasn't. Everything was going to according to plan. Not their plan, of course. But God's plan. So fear made them act. Caiaphas *pretended* to speak and act rationally, but there was nothing rational about it. They were panicking. They had to get rid of Jesus. They had to do whatever it takes. They had to even cooperate with Rome. They had to even, in the end, apostasize. ***We have no king but Caesar.*** That is, God is not our king.

They were, as Isaiah told us tonight, *the people who are blind, yet have eyes*.

They had *spiritual* macular degeneration. They could see everything swirling about them, but not what was right in front of them.

Of course, it's easy to see how that applies to our situation today. There is so much going on, so much swirling about us. Things are changing so fast and it's easy to think, like the Jewish leaders of that day, that everything is out of control.

**It's not.** Out of *our* control, maybe. But we need to see not just what is swirling all around us, but what is right in front of us. That our Lord is in control.

Our Lord was in control when He was betrayed. He tells Judas to do what he came to do.

Our Lord was in control when He was arrested. He shows that by making all the soldiers and guards fall to the ground before allowing them to arrest Him.

Our Lord was in control when He was on trial. He didn't argue with Pilate to save His life. He told Pilate, in fact, that any authority He had was given to Him from above, by God.

Our Lord was in control when He was being whipped. He could have called down more than 12 legions of angels to stop it - but He didn't.

Our Lord was in control when He was crucified; while He was hanging on the cross. He doesn't jump down. He forgives, and promises, and cares. And when He dies, He hands over His Spirit - it isn't taken from Him.

The disciples thought everything was going wrong. They made some bad decisions and acted in some unfortunate ways. But still God brought good out of it. The greatest good. The forgiveness of our sins. The conquering of death. The defeat of the devil. The promise of eternal life.

And those fearful, sometimes bumbling twelve, were then going to be those who would go out and spread this news. They were the witnesses that Isaiah said would be sent. Sent to preach to the world, to open the eyes of the world, to see what had just happened before their very eyes - that God had fulfilled all His promises for them in Christ. That there on the cross, despite everything that was swirling about them, is their salvation.

And so for us today. It's easy for all the stuff swirling about us - all the news, all the panic, all the changes - to capture our attention and drive us to fear. But instead of focusing on all that, with a kind of spiritual macular degeneration, focus on Christ crucified. That is what this season of Lent is holding before our eyes. Don't let all this

[what is swirling all around us] drive us to act in fear. Look to Christ and live in confidence.

For He is still in control. Even if we don't see it. Even if we don't understand it.

For what is happening now is not worse than what happened on the cross. In fact, the cross was *far* worse! For as Isaiah would go on to say, Jesus bore not only all of our *sins*, but all of our diseases, all of our sicknesses, all of our afflictions, all of our failures, all of our rebellion - all sin and all its effects were on Him on the cross. And yet He remained in control. So too in these days of great distress.

So don't let all the stuff swirling all around us give you spiritual macular degeneration. Keep Christ at the center every day and look to Him. For He is not gone nor turned away, but is still caring for His Bride, His Church. **You**. And He won't stop.

And maybe He'll even give us the opportunity to proclaim that to people and help *them* to see. To hold Christ up before their eyes and give them hope. To help *their* spiritual macular degeneration. So that just maybe much good will come out of this difficult time.

So as I have been saying, be careful, be safe, be smart, and be wise, but do not fear. We have a king. An eternal one. Named Jesus.

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