

The grace, mercy, and peace of Christ Jesus rest upon each and every one of you this day.

For those of you who know your Scripture, you're already well-aware of the fact that faith is not based on what you see, but rather on what you hear. "Faith comes through hearing; hearing the Word of Christ." "Faith is the assurance of things hoped for; the conviction of things not seen." Our faith is based on hearing, not seeing.

Simple enough, right? Now, if any of you happen to have a basic understanding of Latin, you already know that the title given to this Sunday in Lent—Oculi—is about the eyes. It's about seeing. This is the very first word in the Introit for today—oculi; eyes—which means that this is the very first word that people would've heard as the worship service began way back when the worship service was conducted in Latin. "Oculi mei semper ad Dominum—My eyes are always turned towards the Lord." Okay...but faith comes through hearing, not seeing, so shouldn't our ears be turned towards the Lord? But wait - these are the words of Scripture, the words that the Holy Spirit inspired King David to put to paper in Psalm 25.

"But pastor, we were listening - faith has nothing to do with seeing!" Aha! That's not true at all. Now, can your eyes deceive you? Absolutely. As I said before, Scripture is clear that we are not to trust our eyes, but our ears. We are told not to base our faith on what we see, and for good reason. Our eyes can and do deceive us.

This is what got the Old Testament Israelites in trouble, and that trouble was nothing new. So what was the problem? Basically, they were idolatrous. They had some major ocular problems. For one thing, they looked around at their neighbors, and they competed with them and wanted to be like them. Not only that, but they were trusting in all the good and prosperous things they were seeing all around them in

their own daily lives. Worse yet, as Jeremiah tells us in chapter 7, they were looking to the bricks-and-mortar of the temple; they were looking to their own actions and deeds performed at the temple, and they were seeing righteousness and security. They were looking at all these various things and making the incorrect connection that all this bounty and abundance and sacrifice and spirited worship, right down to the letter of the law, was all proof that God was happy with them and their works-righteous, idolatrous, self-serving ways. “Clearly, we’re awesome. Just look at how God has so abundantly and richly rewarded us!”

And this is where God sends Jeremiah to speak the Truth to such wretched and damnable error. They didn’t see it, but they were looking to all the wrong things for hope, for assurance, for peace. They had taken their eyes off God. God tells Jeremiah to remind them of how that all played out with their forefathers in Shiloh a few centuries earlier. A little historical background: Shiloh was the “capital city” of the Promised Land. Shiloh was where God Himself had the tabernacle take up permanent residence. No more were the Israelites on the move. God had led them to a beautiful, peaceful, abundant pasture land of bounty; a place flowing with milk and honey—Shiloh. This was where the glory and presence of the Lord was to dwell permanently.

But...those Israelite forefathers had taken their focus off of God. They began trusting in their works and their own perceived sense of holiness. They began going through the motions and punching the clock, taking God’s grace and mercy and presence for granted. They began looking to the sacrifices as their works they could do to win God over and make Him happy, rather than seeing those sacrifices for what they really were; for what God said they were—substitutes that took

the justly-deserved place for those sinful children of Adam; substitutes that tangibly showed God's grace and mercy to them.

As you can well-imagine, that didn't sit well with God. He had warned them and chastised them and repeatedly called them back to repentance, but they paid no attention. So, God sent the wicked Philistines in to utterly lay waste to Shiloh. Israel was left destitute and barren; a hellish, empty wasteland. Sadly, the Israelites in Jeremiah's time hadn't learned a thing from their forefathers.

Jeremiah obeys God, and enters the holy house of the Lord, boldly proclaiming the Truth...a Truth that our Lord Christ would proclaim to His cocky apostles 600 years later in the same setting. "See all this? It won't last. It's all coming down. Not one stone left standing upon another." Jeremiah says to all these people (in the very house of the Lord), "See all this? Go look at Shiloh. Shiloh's history is your future. Repent! Turn and look to God!"

And we know that Jeremiah's faithful messenger service wasn't exactly well-received. In fact, it was utterly rejected. And here's the thing: I know it's very easy to hear all this and make the connection to our day and age. And you know what? You're absolutely right in making the connection! We need to turn around and turn back to God. We need to get our focus back on God and His Truth. We need to turn back from the darkness and come into His marvelous and life-giving Light. But...before you break out the torches and pitchforks; before you armor up in your Crusader gear, take a good long look in the mirror. What do you see when you look in God's holy Word? What do you see when you cast your eyes upon His holy Law? I confess, I look to that holy and perfect Word, and all I see is a corpse staring back at me. I suspect your reflection in that mirror looks the same, although you may not want to see it.

In faith we do see things differently, don't we? Just look at this cross. By all worldly standards, all you see here is defeat. All you see is the loser. But...the eyes of faith, opened by the life-giving Word of God, see things in a different light. We see victory. Yes, we do still see death, and thank God we see death! Without this death, we have no peace, no comfort, and no assurance! We see Shiloh being utterly laid waste and made desolate...all for us; all out of the unconditional and incomprehensible love that God has for us. Through the eyes of faith we look here and we see God's love; love made flesh and hung on a cross to die for us. That's why we refer to Friday in Holy Week as "Good Friday."

"It is finished" was victoriously proclaimed here! Trust this Word. You hear this Word, and you see it. You don't believe because you see; rather, you see because you believe. You don't see what the rest of the world sees. My dear brothers and sisters in Christ: May you never stop seeing this. May you never look anywhere else for this sure and certain peace of almighty God. May there never be a disconnect. Faithful seeing and faithful hearing go together. May your eyes of faith follow your ears of faith, and may your focus be ever and always on the Word of God—the Word made flesh...for you. Amen.