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St. John's Lutheran Church of Burlington
4 May 2025

Sermon on John 21, Acts 9, and Revelation 5

Worship Theme:

WE CAN SEE THINGS CLEARLY

Navigating life blind poses a plethora of challenges that the sighted do not face. Scripture often uses blindness to explain how hard life is without a correct understanding of Christ. Spiritual blindness can take many different forms: opposition to the Gospel, confusion about Jesus' identity, or misunderstanding about our spiritual condition. Easter replaces this blindness with true sight. Easter allows us to see where we sinners stand with a holy God, who holds our future in his hands, and who is worth our eternal worship. Because Jesus lives, we can see things clearly.

Sermon Theme: "20/20 Easter Vision"

1. Sees Jesus Provide Physically (John 21)
2. Sees Jesus Provide Spiritually (Acts 9)
3. Sees Jesus Provide Eternally (Revelation 5)

How is your vision? Maybe you're someone who has been blessed with 20/20 vision and you can see everything perfectly clearly all the time. If so, what a blessing – praise God! Or maybe you're someone like me whose eyes need a little help from glasses or contacts. If so, praise God that we have these wonderful tools to help us! Whether you have perfect 20/20 vision or not, how good are you at seeing the future? What a ridiculous thing to ask, right? It doesn't matter how strong or weak our eyes are, none of us can see the future. At least, not with these eyes. So today God's Word teaches us to see with better vision, **Easter vision!**

It might be helpful to have the readings open in front of you today. Let's start with John 21. Jesus' disciples weren't doing such a great job seeing the future. If they could, they probably wouldn't have spent an entire night out on the lake trying to catch some fish, because we're told "*that night they caught nothing.*" It had been a crazy time for them. Holy Week happened along with all the emotional ups and downs that came with it, not the least of which was brought on by Easter Sunday when Jesus showed up again, very much alive and well and victorious over sin, death, and Satan forever! Now they had seen Jesus twice already, but it was still hard to take it all in and believe it was all real, so they decide to do something simple: go fishing, calm down a bit, and maybe get a little something to eat. But they caught nothing. These men, who used to make a living catching fish, caught nothing more than a quiet uneventful night on the water.

How do you think they felt? Frustrated and upset? Wondering why they were even out there? Were they talking about just giving up and trying to find a little breakfast some other way? It's not easy providing for physical needs in this world. We try our best, work hard, earn paychecks, and put up with all kinds of nonsense just to put food on our family's table and keep a roof over our heads. But it probably isn't very difficult to think of a time when you worked as hard as your

body would let you and still your efforts fell completely flat. Just like a whole night spent on the lake with nothing to show but soggy empty nets.

If we trust in ourselves to provide for our future, it's always going to be unknown. We can work hard and plan smart, but we never know what's going to happen even one hour from now, never mind a month, a year, or a decade. If we rely on ourselves to provide comfort, peace, and security for our future, we'll never find it. We have neither the power nor the ability to guarantee these things.

But someone else does. We're told, *Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize it was him.* Their vision was failing again. Not only could they not see the future, but they also couldn't see the shore to know who was standing on it. Jesus told them to try the nets one more time, and they became so full of fish that they couldn't even get them back into the boat! And here's a super cool thing – this had happened before. In Luke 5, Jesus had just called the disciples to follow him, he told them to let down the nets one more time after a night just like this one, and *they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break, and they filled both boats so full that they began to sink.* (Luke 5:6-7) This was a delightfully familiar event, and immediately they realized what they hadn't seen before: *The disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!"* What their regular eyes couldn't see, their eyes of faith could see quite clearly: **Jesus Provides for Physical Needs.** The risen victorious Jesus was standing right there, giving his disciples exactly what they needed.

By the grace of God, you and I have been given that same faith vision: If we trust in ourselves to provide all our physical needs on earth, completely apart from God, we'll fail every time. But our faith eyes look at all the blessings we have – homes, cars, possessions, food, jobs, money, and everything else – and we know where they truly come from. No matter what, no matter when, and no matter how, **Easter Vision Sees Jesus Provide Physically.**

If Physical Needs were the only thing we had to worry about, then our lives wouldn't really be all that complicated. But there's much more. In Acts 9, a man named Saul was going to learn that. Saul's life was on a dark path, *breathing murderous threats against the Lord's disciples, taking them as prisoners.* But Saul's vision obviously could not see the future, because on this particular day, an insanely unexpected thing happened: *a light from heaven flashed around him, the voice of Jesus spoke to him, and Saul fell to the ground blind!* The man who was actively looking for Christians to capture now could see absolutely nothing at all. His blind eyes now matched his blind heart.

Spiritually, Saul thought he was doing great. He thought he was doing what God wanted. He thought he had everything all figured out and was going to be the greatest follower God ever had! But he had it all completely turned around and backwards. He was spiritually blind and couldn't see Jesus for who he truly is. Every single human being is exactly like Saul from the moment we begin to exist. Our natural spiritual thoughts get everything mixed up and turned around, thinking, "I can take care of my own needs by working hard and doing the right stuff." If we believe in God at all, we think he cares the most about what we do and that if we're

good enough, we'll get rewarded. But that's not sight; that's blindness! Because if we can't see Jesus, we can't see anything. And if we try to live a spiritual life apart from Jesus, we're going to fail. Spiritual life without Jesus always fails.

So Jesus changed Saul's spiritual vision. He appeared both to Saul and to a believer named Ananias and told them that Saul was going to be changed – a complete spiritual 180! The first step, restore Saul's physical sight and let him see again – what a blessing! But also an illustration for what was about to happen to Saul spiritually. This shocking change could never have been guessed or foreseen by people, yet the Bible shares it with surprisingly simple words: *Saul got up and was baptized*. A brand-new faith and a brand-new life; in spite of everything Saul had done, now he was forgiven and free, a dearly-loved child in God's family!

Of course, what human eyes could never see coming, God knew all along. He had told Ananias, "*This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name.*" And Saul began to do exactly that. He *grew more and more powerful, proving that Jesus is the Messiah*. No human power could have caused that change. But God's power can and did, just as it has done for us too. By the grace of God, you and I have been given this same faith vision: if we trust in ourselves to get spiritually right and to please God and earn anything good, we'll fail every time. We can never be on the right side of spirituality by ourselves. But Jesus changes everything for us. God the Holy Spirit comes to us in his Holy Word and sacraments and he creates and strengthens faith which helps us stay connected to Jesus! Only with Jesus will our faith be safe and secure, and only through faith in Jesus are we perfectly changed. In spite of everything we have ever done, now we are forgiven and free, dearly-loved children in God's family. We will never find these blessings anywhere except in Jesus, certainly not in ourselves or by our own doing. So Jesus freely gives us exactly what we need. No matter what, no matter when, and no matter how, **Easter Vision Sees Jesus Provide Spiritually.**

But do you ever find yourself wondering why it all matters? As in, why does it matter if we know whether it's God who provides for our physical needs or not, or why does it matter if we have faith in Jesus or not? After all, a life with Jesus is often a difficult one, even in a safe country like ours. Countless Christians around the world live in fear every day that they will be discovered as followers of Jesus and will lose their lives because of it. We don't have that danger here.

But life with Jesus isn't a walk in the park no matter where we live, because wherever Jesus and his followers go, enemies follow. Even though the devil and his demons have lost forever, they still try to inflict as much suffering on God's people as possible. Satan wants us to question and doubt God and give up our faith in him. Why? Because if we do, then we'll never experience the eternity Jesus won for us with his cross and empty tomb. An eternity that is beautifully described in Revelation 5: *countless angels, living creatures, and elders encircling the throne, and in a loud voice saying, "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain!"* If that sounds a little strange at first, take a closer look. Our eyes have never seen this, because we can't see the future. But Revelation 5 beautifully shows us that a spiritual life with Jesus is not pointless. It all leads to this, to eternity in his presence.

When I was a kid, heaven kind of scared me a bit. First, because human brains can never comprehend “forever.” But also because I thought sitting around all day doing nothing but praising Jesus sounded like something I would get tired of doing – I wanted some variety in activities, some other fun things to do! I’ve learned a few things since then, though. True, we don’t know a whole lot about heaven. We don’t know exactly what it’s going to be like or exactly what we’ll do while we’re there. The Bible tells us some things, but most of the details are left for us to wait and see when we get there. So here’s what I do know: whatever we do and whatever it’s like, every moment will be worth thanking Jesus for. There will never be even a single teeny tiny bad thing in heaven – not even a stubbed toe or a slightly sad moment. And there will never be any boredom, even though it is unending and timeless. Every moment of forever will be so good and perfect that we will thank Jesus for them all.

After all, Jesus is the only reason we’ll be there. The alternative is horrifying – unending pain and suffering and torture in hell, with absolutely no end or relief ever. That’s what the devil is getting, and that’s what everybody who doesn’t believe in Jesus is getting. But that’s also what Jesus lived, died, and rose to save us from. He saved me and you from eternal pain, for eternal peace, and he does all this for us through faith, completely because of his unfailing love for us.

By the grace of God, you and I have been given faith vision to see that our eternity isn’t something we need to worry about anymore. Since we are connected to Jesus by faith, we know that no matter what happens to us in life, no matter how long we live here, and no matter how hard it may be to wait, we will be with Jesus forever. **Easter Vision Sees Jesus Provide Eternally.**

So what does all this mean? Why did we spend so much time today on these three little chunks of God’s Word? Because this is what it’s all about. This is what our life is all about, this is what our faith is all about, this is what Easter is all about. It’s all about Jesus Providing for us, even if we can’t always see it right away. Our human eyes are great – a wonderful blessing from God, even if we need glasses or contacts. But our faith eyes are always better, because they see Jesus in every part of our lives. When we’re tempted to rely on ourselves to provide for our needs on earth, our **Easter Vision Sees Jesus Provide Physically.** When we’re tempted to give up our faith and to live however we want, not caring what results it may have, our **Easter Vision Sees Jesus Provide Spiritually.** And when we wonder why we’re going through all this trouble and hardship and what the end goal is, our **Easter Vision Sees Jesus Provide Eternally.** Jesus cares about every moment of our lives from the very beginning until our safe arrival home in heaven. So he provides for us in ways we never could have seen coming. We don’t know the future details of our lives, but this we do know: Jesus knows them, and Jesus provides for them perfectly. **THAT** we can clearly see with **20/20 Easter Vision.** Or to put it another way, we are completely confident this is all true because Christ Is Risen!! (He Is Risen, Indeed – Alleluia!) *Now to him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power forever and ever. AMEN!*