

Isaiah 42:14-21February 24, 2008 – 3rd SUNDAY IN LENT**Live in the Light of God's Pleasure** **Pay attention to His healing Word. (vv.18-21)** **Trust God's guiding hand. (vv.14-17)**

In the name of Jesus, the world's Light, dearly redeemed believers:

One of our Seminary professors likes to call Christianity the “un-religion.” Even if you can't remember the old Seven-Up “un-cola” commercials, you can appreciate the “un-religion.” Think how scary the animal sacrifice still practiced by cultural Hmong in Minnesota, or human sacrifice by Aztecs, Incas and Mayans of America. What about self-flagellation by those who whip themselves bloody in one branch of Islam? Or multitudes of Hindus trying to wash their sins away in the filthy waters of India's Ganges River? Why don't we have to do those things? Why do we tell everyone they don't have to either? Because the “un-religion” teaches us to **Live in the Light of God's Pleasure**. Instead of plunging into polluted waters, God the Holy Spirit says to...

 **Pay attention to His healing Word. (vv.18-21)**

“Hear, you deaf; look, you blind, and see!” That sure doesn't sound very nice. You don't go down the street yelling at deaf and blind people. What would it help to tell the blind to see? Or shout at the deaf to hear? Feels bad enough, but then this: **“Who is blind but my servant, and deaf like the messenger I send? Who is blind like the one committed to me, blind like the servant of the LORD?”** Other places in Isaiah, **“the Servant of the LORD”** is Jesus, the pre-Incarnate Christ. But here the context clearly makes this the nation of Israel. And whether you translate **“committed to me”** (NIV), or the one **“that is perfect”** (KJV), the Holy Spirit is talking about Christians as **“blind,” “deaf,”** in trouble with God. This is like someone waking you up in the middle of the night to tell you your house is on fire.

This is unlike any of the world's religions which would either say there is no fire or give you a squirt gun to put it out. God is telling His people we cannot fix ourselves. Husbands will never see how to love their wives as Christ loved the Church. Wives will never hear how to respect their husbands in the fear of the LORD. Kid-Christians or seasoned citizens of Christ will be committed to their own selfishness rather than being perfected in Christ-like love for their neighbor. Out West this is called “a horse pill.”

God's truth is hard to swallow. **“You have seen many things, but have paid no attention; your ears are open, but you hear nothing.”** Even believers perfected in the LORD's righteousness by faith, cannot shed their deaf-blind nature this side of heaven. Listen to Jesus' disciples throughout His earthly ministry. He's ready to ascend into heaven when they ask “the dumbest question in the Bible” about Christ ruling visibly on earth. (Cf. Acts 1:6) After all His top notch teaching as the Son of God, they still cannot hear Jesus saying, **“My kingdom is not of this world”** (John 18:36), or see that **“the kingdom of God is within you”** (Luke 17:20f). Our sinful nature, blind and deaf, cannot be healed. It must drown and die.

All the world's religions are like the Chinese girl's vision of Confucianism. While she feels herself guilty in a deep dark well, someone's shadow shouts down from the top wagging a finger, “You got yourself into this mess; get yourself out of it.” Only Christianity says that none of us, not even Christians, can climb up to God in His perfect, holy heaven. *Annie* may be singing, “The Sun Will Come Out Tomorrow,” but we're too blind to see. Someone has to come down here to help us.

We need rescue like those picture in *The Guardian*. I didn't know Ashton Kutcher had it in him. But ever since I was a boy on the Oregon coast, I've been impressed by the “Coasties” of the U.S. Coast Guard heading out to sea when everyone else is coming in. On the storm tossed waves people who absolutely have run out of options find the blinking lights of the helicopter or the powerful strokes of

rescue swimmers to be the most comforting sight in the world. When finally the sling is lowered, the command to “climb in” is sweet as sweet can be.

Like bright lights in raging surf, ***“it pleased the LORD for the sake of his righteousness to make his law great and glorious.”*** Deaf and blind, we have no way off this sinking ship. We just keep climbing deeper into the bowels of sin, locking the bulkheads behind us. No one else could get in to help us. This side of heaven we will always need to keep confessing the sickness of our souls, the blindness of our eyes, our need for urgent care from God. “When at last I near the shore And the fearful breakers roar ‘Twixt me and the peaceful rest, Then, while leaning on Thy breast, May I hear Thee say to me, “Fear not, I will pilot thee” (TLH 649:3). That’s Good News of sins forgiven, of grace and blessing in the sacraments. Rather than death by drowning in sin, God rescues us in Christ, then gives us the living water of His Word to drink deeply in His refreshing “un-religion.” **Live in the Light of God’s Pleasure as you Pay attention to His healing Word. Live in the Light of God’s Pleasure** and learn with Christ to ...

Trust God’s guiding hand. (vv.14-17)

Don’t you love the way Jesus used His hands as God in today’s Gospel Lesson? (John 9 *passim*) Not because of some sin, but ***“so that the work of God might be displayed in his life,”*** Jesus put mud on the man’s eyes and sent him to wash in the Pool of Siloam. And the man born blind ***“came home seeing”*** – physically. But not until he saw Jesus, did he see with the eyes of faith.

When the LORD God tells the blind to see or the deaf to hear, His Word makes it happen. Remember how He said in the beginning, ***“Let there be light,” and there was light*** (Genesis 1:3)? God can still ***“lay waste the mountains”*** as He wasted Mount Saint Helens, or ***“dry up their vegetation”*** with advancing deserts. God can literally ***“turn rivers into islands and dry up the pools.”*** And spiritually, God can keep this promise that makes me glad to admit my weaknesses and sins. God says, ***“I will lead the blind by ways they have not known, along unfamiliar paths I will guide them; I will turn the darkness into light before them and make the rough places smooth.”***

All of us can look back and see what a miracle it is that God has brought us this far. With the Psalmist we pray most sincerely, ***“Remember not the sins of my youth and my rebellious ways; according to your love remember me, for you are good, O LORD.”*** (Psalm 25:7 NIV) My best efforts often backfired like the time as big brother to my two younger siblings I bought them each a sundae. Then carefully explained how to keep from messing up Mom’s car. Very respectfully my little sister listened until she sheepishly had to point out, “Mark, you’re spilling yours on your lap.” That would have been the story of my life except for the Lord’s unmatched zeal to teach me to **Trust God’s guiding hand.**

Young parents will especially appreciate this picture: ***“For a long time I have kept silent, I have been quiet and held myself back. But now, like a woman in childbirth, I cry out, I gasp and pant.”*** In the pains of childbirth nothing else matters except delivering a healthy baby. God wants us to feel the intensity of His love to give us life. **God’s guiding hand** sent His Son to spread His hands for the nails of our cross, to shed His blood and wash away every unkind word or selfish thought, every day of wandering, every failure to live up to the perfect demands of God’s holy Law. God’s birthing-zeal is absolutely focused on **guiding** us home to heaven. If you’ve ever had a newborn in intensive care, you know what a relief it is to finally get to take your little bundle home. How the heart of our heavenly Father yearns to gather us into His arms and sweep us into that land of light!

“But those who trust in idols, who say to images, ‘You are our gods,’ will be turned back in utter shame.” It’s what Pastor John Hering once said in this pulpit about visiting the new 60’ Buddha with his family in Japan. No one seemed to notice the shame of offering gifts at the base, riding the elevator to the top, then using the facilities to go to the bathroom in Buddha’s head.

Out of sin’s darkness and shadows, **Live in the Light of God’s Pleasure**, the “un-religion” of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.