

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen! Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

"And I will lead the blind in a way that they do not know, in paths that they have not known I will guide them. I will turn the darkness before them into light, the rough places into level ground. These are the things I do, and I do not forsake them"
(Isaiah 42:16).

God's chosen nation of Israel is blind. And this blindness does not illicit any sympathy or pity from God. This blindness only fosters disgust and contempt from God.

The problem was that Israel's blindness was not congenital, as was the case of the blind man in today's reading from John 9. No, Israel's blindness was not because of any sad consequence of some accident or any such devastating disease.

Israel's blindness was willfully and intentionally chosen. Israel chose to be blind. Israel chose to not see. Israel chose to be spiritually blind.

And God had done everything for His people. God had graced His servant Israel with every advantage and with every blessing. Repeatedly, God had intervened for them. God was unrelenting in protecting and providing for His servant Israel.

And yet, Israel looked and refused to see. They did not want to see. Israel was blind by choice.

And yet, Israel could still "see." But they had other things to see. Israel had *their* own plans. Israel focused on *their* own comfort. Israel had its own dreams. Israel dreamed of the idols of their neighbors. They dreamed of their own ambitions. They dreamed of a messiah of their own liking – a worldly messiah. They put their own interests first. So, when it came to the one true God and His glory, Israel chose to be blind.

God presents all His grace and His gifts and His glory. He presents all that He wills to give to His people and what is their response? They respond like a petulant child, who turns away from his parent, squeezes his eyes shut, clasps his hands over his ears and starts humming loudly. But may I ask this question of you: how often do you assume this same posture? How often do you choose to ignore God?

God wants His people to see the wonder and beauty of His great and many gifts, but so often, His people refuse to acknowledge what God has done and instead choose to see the demands and deficiencies of the day.

Even though we have the Old Testament, which as St. Paul says for us Christians serves us as an example so that we wouldn't desire evil as they did (1 Corinthians 10:6-11), the Scripture was written down for our instruction, so that we would learn from the mistakes of the Israelites of old, but we so often close our eyes and cover our ears to God and hum loudly. So often, we just do what comes all too naturally: we become spiritually blind to God.

God has graced us all with family to whom you share life's joys and sorrows, but what fills our eyes all too often are those shortcomings and those quirks. And these shortcomings and quirks seem to multiply with the passage of time.

God, too, has given His people the certainty of His grace through His Means of Grace: His Word and His Sacraments. And all too often, our old sinful nature would rather look for something with a bit more flash and feeling attached. God gives His Word and Sacraments to form and to feed and to comfort His Church. But all too often, our sinful nature only sees things that despise and divide.

God has given His plan for a life of purpose and meaning and so often we choose to turn away and look for something more immediately satisfying.

God gives gift upon gift and grace upon grace, but so often we join those Israelites of old as we put our hands over our ears, we pinch our eyes tight and hum loudly your anthem. All too often, we choose blindness.

So, what does God do? Does He just let us choose our own demise? No! God cannot change who He is. For His love has no other outcome! He proclaims: ***“For a long time I have held My peace; I have kept still and restrained Myself; now I will cry out like a woman in labor; I will gasp and pant”*** (Isaiah 42:14).

So, like a woman at the point of giving birth, there is no holding back for God. There is no other unfolding plan. God will act. If His people will choose to be spiritually blind, He will send another Servant. And this Servant will not be petulant or rebellious. This Servant is the obedient Son. This Servant will not miss what the Lord would have Him to see. This Servant will not fail to hear what He is to hear.

At last, Yahweh has His Servant who is all that Israel and you and me are not. At last, a Servant who is not blind!

Then God proclaims: ***“Hear, you deaf, and look, you blind, that you may see! Who is blind but My Servant, or deaf as My Messenger whom I send? Who is blind as My Dedicated One, or blind as the Servant of the LORD?”*** (Isaiah 42:18-19).

Hmm. This Servant who is not blind ... *is* blind! However, this Servant is not blind to God’s will, but He is blind to the ways of the world. This Servant refuses to see what we all see. He chooses to be blind to the path of indulgence or self-promotion. He chooses to be blind to self-glory and acclaim. He refuses to sin. This Servant willfully will not follow the ways of the fallen world.

God made Him who knew no blindness to be blind for us so that we who are blind might see. God made Him who knew no deafness to be deaf for us so that we who are deaf might hear.

The Blind Servant willfully will not see the ways of this world. He is blind all the way to the cross. He is deaf to the taunts.

This Blind Servant is not blind for the sake of Himself, but for the sake of love. He is the Blind Servant of Yahweh, who comes and faithfully does the deed that He was sent to accomplish.

Jesus is this Blind Servant. He, the Second Person of the Trinity, who is fully God becomes man for you! He takes upon Himself God the Father’s judgment that is supposed to be for you and me, because of our sins. Our sins of lack of trust. Our sins of pride. Our sins of self-interest. The Blind Servant takes this judgment as the nails of condemnation are drawn through His flesh and bone.

The sentence of death falls upon Jesus, the Blind Servant, as He dies, crushed and trampled by the Law. The Blind Servant dies. God dies.

The Jewish authorities who rejected the Savior of the world, and all who agreed with them, did not understand the wonderful truths and blessings they saw with their own eyes. The miracles and sermons of Jesus did not mean a thing to them. They remained blind and deaf. Even after the raising of Lazarus, the Jewish leaders did not change. They did not believe. So, they sought to kill Jesus and Lazarus. Just as their forefathers had remained blind and deaf, so did they.

But the Blind Servant would accomplish His Father's bidding. You see, this Blind Servant is unstoppable in His purpose. He would not remain dead, but live!

As His disciples are hiding out in that locked upper room on that first Easter evening, the Blind Servant appears to them and says, "***Peace be with you***" (John 20). Jesus comes to His blind servants, and He will not be deterred.

Just as Jesus came to His disciples on that first Easter evening, He comes to us this day. He came to them and now to us His blind servants and He will not be deterred.

By our own reason or strength, we could never open our eyes to Jesus. The only strength we have is to close our eyes to Him. But Jesus will not be deterred! So, He sends His Holy Spirit to you as He calls you by the Gospel, enlightens you with His gifts, sanctifies you, and keeps you in the one true faith. The Holy Spirit always points to Jesus, who is the founder and perfecter of the faith, the faithful Blind Servant, as we hear the proclaimed Word and receive His Sacraments. Through these Means of Grace, the Blind Servant freely gives His gifts and blessings, chiefly the forgiveness of sins to which we receive by faith.

God will not be deterred. He will not keep us spiritually blind. He can't. That is not His nature. So, God will lead the blind as He "***will turn the darkness before them into light***" (Isaiah 42:16) through His Blind Servant, Jesus Christ, our Lord.

*Amazing grace—how sweet the sound—
That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost but now am found,
Was blind but now I see!*

(LSB 744, stanza 1)

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You were lost, but now you have been found. Jesus has found you and He ever so gently pulls your hands from your ears and even more gently, He pushes open your wrinkled eyelids. At last, you can see. Now, you see Jesus. Amen.

*The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding,
keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.*

+ SOLI DEO GLORIA +