In the Name of Jesus. Amen.


Those are the vision problems we’ve thought about so far this 2020 Lenten season, thinking about having 20/20 vision, and how these can be not just physical vision problems, but spiritual vision problems, too.

When our vision becomes curved in on ourselves and we don’t focus outside of ourselves, on God and on others. We considered that on Ash Wednesday - how we sometimes get too self-absorbed, too self-focused.

Then we considered the disciples and how they (and we) can focus on heaven and eternity too much, and forget to look at the here and now.

The opposite of that was Judas, who looked too much on the here and now and forgot to look toward the end, the long-term, and how our Lord is working all things toward that for us.

And then we considered the Jewish leaders, and how the things swirling all around them prevented them from seeing what was right in front of them: the promised Messiah! And how that can so easily happen in our lives as well, and how focusing on all that’s swirling around us can make us miss the Christ that is right in front of us.

God’s Word is the cure for all of that. To keep our faith, our spiritual vision, clear and right and focused where it should be.

The vision problem we’ll consider tonight is pressure. If too much pressure builds up in your eye, it can make you blind. It’s called glaucoma. And it affects a lot of people.

But what about spiritual glaucoma? Do you think the pressure in your life can impact your faith and your spiritual vision? Do you think the pressure in your life can lead you to make bad decisions? Do you think the pressure in your life, if left too long, can lead to the spiritual blindness of unbelief? Of course it can. And which of us does not have pressure in our lives? So this is a dangerous thing for us.
Tonight we heard two stories from Scripture about this. The first was the story of Rehoboam. Some of you might not know who he is. He was the son of King Solomon who became king of Israel after Solomon died. You may remember that during King David and then King Solomon’s time, Israel was enjoying it’s greatest and strongest and wealthiest time. Things were good . . . on the outside. But in reality, by the end of Solomon’s reign, Israel was sick. Israel’s faith and spiritual vision was not well. And it came to a head with Rehoboam.

When Rehoboam took over as king, he was pressured on what to do. On the one hand, his father’s old advisors told him to do one thing. On the other hand, his buddies told him to do the exact opposite. And so instead of ruling in a godly way, instead of looking to God for the answer, he succumbed to the pressure and made a bad decision - one that split the kingdom of Israel. A split that resulted in his new rival king instituting new worship and leading the people away from God and His Word - from which they never recovered. Pressure.

And pressure was also what Pontius Pilate had. Many of you might never have heard of Rehoboam, but all of you have heard of Pontius Pilate. We say his name in the Creed every week. Pontius Pilate was the Roman governor of Judea, the man to whom the Jewish leaders brought Jesus for trial. They wanted Jesus put to death, and only Pilate could order that.

The thing is, Pilate was under a lot of pressure. He had already messed up a couple of times as governor, and he was on his last chance with Caesar. Mess up again and he would probably lose his governorship. So when this Jesus problem lands on his plate . . . what to do? He wants to do the right thing. Three times he pronounces the judgment that Jesus hasn’t done anything wrong; that Jesus is not guilty. But with each passing moment, the pressure keeps increasing on Pilate. The Jewish leaders keep pushing, and then when they make the veiled threat of tattling to Caesar if Pilate doesn’t do what they want, he succumbs to the pressure. If it’s going to be him or Jesus that he saves . . . well, that’s an easy answer. Pressure.

Now what about you? What pressures are weighing heavy on you? The list might be long. There is pressure at school, to fit in and be a certain way. There is pressure at work, to perform and be successful, and maybe in ways you don’t agree with or by making sacrifices that you know you shouldn’t. Peer pressure is always strong, no matter how old you are, to think like others do, to do as other do, and be as they are. Maybe you have family pressures, or financial pressure, to provide for your family, or the pressure of worrying about others and how to care for them. There are health pressures, and relationship pressures, to do what you know you shouldn’t. And then there’s the pressure of fear, especially these uncertain days and not knowing what is going to happen next.
Like Rehoboam, pressure can make us make bad decisions. Like Pilate, pressure can make us make bad choices. Pressure can make us so focus on the thing or things pressuring us that we become spiritually blind to God. We can forget His Word, go against His Word, doubt His love and help, and fail to see Him in our situation and lives. How He is using this to help us, or for us to help others. But we don’t see it because of our spiritual glaucoma. The pressure.

Lent calls us to repent of this, and turn to the Word of God for the truth. Not necessarily to make the pressure go away - it may not! But to see again the one who is with us in it, and sustaining us through it. On our own, all the pressures of life can and probably will crush us. They will certainly cause us to do things we don’t want to do. But we’re not on our own. We have a Saviour with us. A Saviour who carried the cross for us. A Saviour who bore our sins on that cross. A Saviour who was tempted for us and whipped for us. A Saviour who has bid us cast our burdens on Him. A Saviour who cannot be crushed, for when crushed on the cross rose victorious. And now lives to give that victory to us.

And we have a Saviour who does and is all that for us because as we especially remember this day, March 25th, He is the Son of God born as a man for us. Today is exactly nine months before our celebration of Christmas, and so the day we celebrate the Anunciation of Our Lord, or, when the angel Gabriel came to Mary, told her she was to be the mother of Jesus, and Jesus was conceived. That’s today. Jesus’ conception day. It is a day of joy in the midst of Lent. But talk about pressure! What pressure must have been on Mary, knowing that being pregnant before her marriage to Joseph was going to bring all kinds of problems! How could she do it? How could she agree to such a thing?

Well, it wasn’t her. It was the Word of God, and the Spirit of God working through the Word that gave her the faith and strength to say let it be to me according to your word (Luke 1:38). On her own, like us, the pressure would have been too much. But the Word of God gives the strength and sight and faith we need in a world full of pressure.

So when the pressures of life are pressing down hard on you, and they’re all you can see and feel . . . When you’re tempted to give in or go against what you know is right . . . When fear seems overwhelming and tomorrow seems so uncertain . . . remember Rehoboam, remember Pilate, and remember Mary. Satan wants to use this pressure to make you like Rehoboam and Pilate. Your merciful Father would use this pressure to make you like Mary, to hear His Word, believe his promises, and look to Him for all you need. For His Word is the medicine we need to heal our spiritual glaucoma. And though it won’t be easy and life may even get harder, your Father, your Saviour, and His Spirit will not let you down.

For you are baptized! You are His child. He was crucified for you, so don’t crucify yourself. His Word and Spirit will provide all you need. When the pressure is great and when it is little. He went through it all, so He can help.
So be careful, be safe, be smart, and be wise, but do not fear. As we sang, *O little flock, fear not the foe* (LSB #666). The victory is yours, in Christ. Your uncrushable Rock and your faithful Redeemer.

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