

The 3rd Sunday in Lent
March 7, 2010
Jer. 26:1-15 • Eph. 5:1-9 • Luke 11:14-28

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“Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.”

The 3rd Sunday in Lent.

“Oculi” its ancient name,
because of the first words heard in the service,
the words of the (Entrance) Psalm 25:
“Oculi mei semper ad Dominum.”
“My eyes are ever toward the Lord.”

And oh do we have reason to turn our eyes ever toward the Lord!

Our feet are constantly entangled in *the net* of sin. We are often *lonely and afflicted... put to shame* by our guilt, our weakness, our failures. Our *enemies exult over us*. The *troubles of our heart become enlarged*. We wake up day after day to new *distresses*, without end. We are *afflicted and troubled*. Our *souls* are attacked by Satan.¹

How in the world could anyone... how can we ever think that we could go it alone, without turning *our eyes toward the Lord*, in the face of all this?

And yet we do it all the time! We forget about God. We “box Him up” for our occasional attention, maybe once a week, or even less. We live most of the time focusing on our strength, our ability, our determination, our cleverness, our priorities, our desires, our judgment about what God should do and how He should do it.

Be honest. Confess it.

We wish *our eyes were ever toward the Lord*. But truthfully, they are more often focused inwardly on ourselves... in self-pity, self-assurance, and self-gratification.

The apostle Paul, in today's Epistle, names some of the ways our feet get caught in the net of sin when our eyes are curved in on ourselves: Sexual immorality. All impurity. Covetousness. Filthiness. Foolish talk. Crude joking.

The traditional Gospel appointed for Oculi Sunday is the one we heard, from Luke 11, about Jesus casting out a demon, then being charged with casting it out by the power of Beelzebul, then responding with His words about a kingdom divided against itself. At the end of that Gospel, when a woman cries out, *“Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breasts at which you nursed,”* Jesus exclaims:

“Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!”

And there's a connection between this final word of Jesus, and *Oculi*, our eyes, because

¹ Language from the Introit, Psalm 25

it is by *hearing the word of God and keeping it* that our eyes remain *ever toward the Lord!*

This beatitude of Jesus—that they are blest *who hear the word of God and keep it*—is a double-edged sword. Because what does it say about those who don't hear the word of God and keep it (i.e. don't cherish it and hold it fast)? What does it say about us when we wander away from God's Word, or let it go in one ear and out the other, or don't listen to the Jeremiah's of our time whom God sends to us today?

What does it mean for us when we don't hear and keep God's word?? It means that we have no reason to expect God's blessing! God's blessing to us, His grace for us, His help in every time of need comes specifically and exclusively through the ministry of His Word to us. When we claim the name of Christian, but do not connect that with the constant hearing and holding fast to God's Word, we are left on our own when our feet become entangled in *the net* of sin, when we are *lonely and afflicted*, when we are *shamed* by our guilt. We are left to our own devices, when the *troubles of our heart become enlarged*, when we experience *distresses*, and are *afflicted and troubled*, when our *soul* is attacked by Satan. We must never believe the lie of Beelzebul that we are blessed by God apart from the hearing of His Word! Because it is only through God's Word that Christ is revealed to us. And it is only through Christ that God's grace is made known to us. And it is only by God's grace that we are sustained in every physical and spiritual need.

So listen again to the traditional Collect—the summary, thematic prayer that we have already prayed on this Oculi Sunday:

O God, whose glory it is always to have mercy,
be gracious to all who have gone astray from Your ways
and bring them again with penitent hearts and steadfast faith
to embrace and hold fast the unchangeable truth of Your Word.

God has had mercy on us through His Son Jesus Christ who "*loved us and gave himself up for us, as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.*"² Because of Christ's atoning death for us on the cross, we have hope when our feet get entangled in *the net* of sin. In Christ, we have God's promise that the Father's heart is *turned toward us and is gracious to us* when we are lonely and afflicted (and in every other time of need). Because Christ gave himself up for us none who trust in Him will *be put to shame* on the Last Day. Though we too are called to bear our crosses in this life, our *enemies* will not *exult over us* forever, but will be judged by the Victorious One who is on our side. In Christ, and with Christ, and united to Him in His resurrection, God *will bring us out of our distresses*. He knows *our afflictions and troubles; and forgives all our sin. He guards your soul, and delivers you* here in time and there in eternity!

All of this God has done for you, and gives to you in Christ. And God's Word delivers it to you. His Word brings it home to you. His Word connects you to the love and saving sacrifice of Jesus Christ. God's Word is far more than information. It is the Word of the Father Himself. It is God coming to you and revealing His heart to you. God's Word is living and active. It is creative, formative, causative... It does things. It not only brings you to faith, but keeps you in faith, and raises up in you daily, richly, constantly, the New Man, given in Baptism who wants to keep God Word, and connects you with Him who has kept it perfectly on your behalf. God's Word changes

² Ephesians 5:2

your heart! It changes your perspective, your outlook on life. And thus, in any and every circumstance, God's Word puts a new song in your mouth and gives you the grace to say boldly and with conviction, *"My eyes are ever toward the Lord!"* He will do everything I need! He does give me everything I need! He is for me!

And when, by God's grace, through the powerful working of His Word, your Oculi are ever toward the Lord, **YOU ARE BLESSED** no matter what the temporary outward appearances!

"Blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it!"