

Holy Cross, Daggett and St. Mark, Wallace Lutheran Churches, Michigan

The Third Sunday after Pentecost

June 14, 2015

2 Corinthians 4:13-18

It is written: "I believed; therefore I have spoken." With that same spirit of faith we also believe and therefore speak, because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you in his presence. All this is for your benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God. Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

Have you ever seen a magic eye picture? They were popular a while ago, but I found one and I put it on today's bulletin cover. The magic eye picture doesn't really look like much when you first glance at it. It seems to be nothing more than a bunch of lines or pictures arranged in a squiggly pattern. However, when you stop to stare at it for a while and let your eyes relax something "magical" happens. Magically a hidden three dimensional picture appears.

Magic eye pictures were popular when I was growing up, but they usually stirred up some strong emotions in some people because you felt one of two ways about them. You either really liked them because you were able to see the hidden 3-D picture which wasn't there when you first looked. Or you couldn't stand them because you looked and you looked and you looked but you could never see the 3-D picture and your inability to see the picture would bug you and frustrate you to no end.

I don't think the apostle Paul ever saw a magic eye 3-D picture during his lifetime, but a magic eye picture helps to illustrate our lesson today. Why does it help to illustrate our lesson? It helps to illustrate our lesson because our lesson talks about things which are seen and things which are unseen. Paul says, **"We fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal."**

Paul says we have two options in this world: we can focus on what is seen in this world or what is unseen in this world. People's reaction to magic eye pictures helps illustrate Paul's point about people who focus on what is seen in this world versus what is unseen. People who are unable to see the 3-D image in the magic eye picture are like the people who can only focus on what is seen in this world rather than what is unseen.

People who look at a magic eye picture and can't see anything but pizza toppings, sea horses or squiggly lines often grow upset and frustrated. They want to see the 3-D image. They know it is there somewhere, but they can't see it. All they can see is pizza toppings, sea horses or squiggly lines and they don't want to see these things. They want to see the picture. They want to see the image. They don't want to see the surface. They long to see the unseen, but they can't.

No matter how hard they try they can't see the image. They are unable to see the image because their eyes and their brains just can't do it. Doesn't this attitude describe people in this world who can only focus on what is seen and not unseen? Don't people often look and focus on what they can see and think it can actually give their lives meaning? Who are some of these people who are consumed by what is seen rather than what is unseen?

I think one obvious group who thinks what is seen will give their lives meaning is sports fans. How many people pour their lives in to cheering on their favorite team? I think of a news story about Packer fans Gary and Ginger Kerkoff who purchased an old ambulance and turned it into a Packers-themed tailgating machine. They painted the ambulance green and gold, replaced the inside with tvs and posters and changed the rescue lights to green and yellow.

This couple has done all of these things, but it leads me to ask: will their fandom give their lives real meaning or purpose? The answer has to be and it cannot be anything other than a resounding no. Why

must the answer be no? It must be no because trying to find meaning and purpose in our lives by simply cheering on a sports team will leave us disappointed and crushed because the only thing our favorite sports team can do is entertain us. It can't give us purpose or meaning.

Our favorite sports team or organization really doesn't care what happens to us in our lives. For example: you could be the most loyal season ticket holder who has ever lived. You might not have missed a game in 40 years. You've skipped weddings, funerals, birthdays, anniversaries and many other things to cheer the team on. You have poured your blood sweat and tears into the team, but one day you lose your job and income to pay for your season tickets.

Do you think the Packers or any other team would say to you, "You've been such a loyal fan of ours. We know you are going through some rough financial times right now. We'll eat the cost of your tickets until you can pay for them again and you don't have to pay the cost back." Do you think the Packers or any other team would say this to you? I don't think so. They would tell you to get lost because they don't care about the reason you can't pay. They only care about the fact you can't pay for the tickets.

How would you feel if this happened to you? Would you feel betrayed because you sacrificed so much of your own life for an organization which doesn't care about you? Would you feel hurt because your loyalty because has gone unrecognized? Would you be frustrated and angry because you focused on what was seen rather than unseen? I would imagine we would feel hurt, betrayed, frustrated and angry that our love for our beloved team was on a different level than our beloved team's love for us.

Yet, how often don't we do this with so many things in our lives? How often don't we pour everything into activities like golf, hunting, fishing, little league, work or hobbies and solely focus on what is seen? We think these activities will give meaning and purpose to our lives, but they constantly leave us wanting. We long for more, but we can't have it because the joy these things bring us doesn't last. It is quick and fleeting because it focuses on what is seen rather than unseen.

What will give our lives purpose and meaning? **"Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. We know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you in his presence. All this is for your benefit."** The only thing which will give our lives purpose and meaning is by focusing on the unseen things in life rather than the seen. What are the unseen things we should focus on?

We can focus on the unseen fact that we have been raised with Christ and elevated to glory with him. Paul promises us, **"We know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you in his presence. All this is for your benefit."** Paul tells us everything Jesus has ever done is for our benefit. Jesus willingly came into this world with the sole and burning focus of gaining for us the unseen glories of heaven.

We saw this laser like focus on our salvation in our gospel lesson. Jesus encounters two groups in our gospel lesson who both think he is crazy. The religious leaders of the day think he is nothing more than the devil who is going around and performing cheap tricks to fool people. His mother and brothers think

he is crazy because he calls himself the son of God and keeps challenging the religious leaders of the day. How does Jesus react to these challenges? He ignores them both.

He isn't crazy. The only thing he has on his mind is our salvation and he must make this unseen gift known. The only way for this to happen is to tell others about himself and what his mission on earth is all about. His mission is to give his own life on behalf of sinners to win forgiveness of their sins to appease the unseen wrath and anger of God. Jesus' death stilled God's wrath against us and his resurrection elevates us to be able to stand in glory with him in heaven.

We can't see this on our own. It is like looking at a magic eye picture and not being able to see the picture. But the Holy Spirit has raised us from the dead and relaxes our eyes and reveals to us the unseen picture of salvation which Jesus has painted for us. This picture is painted with the rich red of Jesus' precious blood. There is gold in this picture too. The gold comes from the crown of life which Jesus gives to us. The picture is illumined by the unending light of heaven.

The Holy Spirit brings this picture into view and helps focus on the unseen eternal glory of heaven. How does he do this? He does it through such simple means. He does it through the sign of the cross placed upon the head and the heart and the splashing of water with words to mark us as redeemed children of God. He uses the waters of Holy Baptism to bury us into Christ and raises us to stand with him in glory forever. He reveals the unseen to us and shows us we have been raised with Christ.

What will the fact we have been raised with Christ allow us to do? **"We fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal."** We are able to fix our eyes on the unseen and eternal rather than on the seen because we have been raised with Christ. What does focusing on the unseen rather than the seen look like? Well, it gives us perspective about what is important in our lives.

Remembering we have been raised with Christ allows us to realize there is more to life than our favorite sports team and how well they play. It is perfectly fine to have a favorite team to cheer and root on. It is a fine thing to do. However, is it beneficial to us or those around us when our favorite team's loss causes us to curse at the officials? Or yell at the television or family? Or we allow the loss to put us in a bad mood for a week or a couple of months? Or are we focused on the seen rather than the unseen?

Are we focused on the seen or unseen when we put golf, hunting, fishing, little league practice or another hobby in front of our callings to be productive workers or students or family members? Where will our focus be when we remember we have been raised with Christ? Our focus will be on the unseen when we remember we have been raised with Christ that he will never let us go. He will always be there for us, unlike a sports team who kicks us to the curb when we can't afford the tickets,

You might be able to find the hidden picture in a magic eye picture and you might not. However, the Holy Spirit has done an amazing thing for us. He has revealed the unseen to us by raising us with Christ and he allows us to focus on the unseen eternal glory of heaven. **"We fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal."** We thank God for this revelation and ask that he keep us focused on the unseen for the rest of our lives. Amen.