

3rd Sunday of Easter
April 27, 2025
Lincoln Heights Lutheran Church
We Can See Things Clearly

John 21:1-14 (EHV)

After this, Jesus showed himself again to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias. This is how he showed himself: ²Simon Peter, Thomas (called the Twin), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together. ³Simon Peter said to them, "I'm going fishing."

They replied, "We'll go with you."

They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing. ⁴Early in the morning, Jesus was standing on the shore, but the disciples did not know it was Jesus.

⁵Jesus called to them, "Boys, don't you have any fish?"

"No!" they answered.

⁶He told them, "Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some." So they cast the net out. Then they were not able to haul it in because of the large number of fish.

⁷The disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" When Simon Peter heard, "It is the Lord!" he tied his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the sea. ⁸But the other disciples came in the little boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from shore, about one hundred yards. ⁹When they stepped out on land, they saw some bread and a charcoal fire with fish on it. ¹⁰Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish you just caught."

¹¹So Simon Peter climbed aboard and hauled the net to land, full of large fish, 153 of them. Yet even with so many, the net was not torn.

¹²Jesus said to them, "Come, eat breakfast."

None of the disciples dared ask him, "Who are you?" because they knew it was the Lord.

¹³Jesus came, took the bread, and gave it to them, and also the fish. ¹⁴This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead.

Dear Friends in Christ,

Without my glasses, my eyesight is rather poor. The Iowa DOT would not allow me to get a driver's license without these glasses. If I take off my glasses, you all become very fuzzy and unless I have other cues, I would only identify you as a human and not much more specific than that. Reading without my glasses is out of the question unless I hold the text very close. Praise the Lord for allowing us humans the ability to understand optics and develop glasses. As soon as I put on my glasses, I can see clearly. The world goes from fuzzy and unknown to known and clear in an instant.

There is another kind of sight that is not so easy to correct. It is not our physical eyesight that makes it difficult to see the world, ourselves and our Savior clearly. Instead, our limited human reason prevents us from seeing things in the way God sees them. Our sinful human minds warp and cloud what God wants us to see clearly. The sinful influences in our world distort the truth that God wants us to know and believe clearly.

We would love to be able to throw on some glasses and instantly see spiritual truths clearly. We would love to be able to grab our faith glasses when we have doubts in life and suddenly see our Savior clearly and have no doubts floating about in our vision. How great it would be to put on our truth glasses and have all the lies of the devil, the world and our own sinful flesh filtered out by the polarized lens of God's truth. But this is not the way God generally works for us to clearly see the truths of the Scriptures. Normally, God develops our spiritual eyesight over time, a lifetime.

The initial gift of faith in Christ is an exception to this general rule. The Holy Spirit brings someone from unbelief to faith in an instant. There is no process to go through. There is no time to wait. A child is brought to the baptismal font an unbeliever and returns to the pews as a believer. When water is applied in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, faith begins where there was no faith. The same is true for someone who is brought to faith through the gospel in the Word. This person may be exposed to the gospel for years but there is one instance in which they do not trust in Christ and the next when they do. There is no partial conversion or partial faith. You either believe or you don't.

The disciples believed already but were confused and had doubts. They were believers even before they met Jesus. These men, along with many in Israel trusted that God would one day send the Messiah to save them. Jesus called the Twelve to follow him and connected the dots for them. By his miracles and authoritative teaching, Jesus cleared their vision. They were convinced that Jesus is the Messiah they had hoped for. They confessed that Jesus is the Son of God. Jesus continued to clear up their vision of God and God's will by his parables in public and private explanations to the disciples. He told them God's big plan was for him to suffer, die and rise on the third day. They struggled to understand this plan especially when it happened. They had fears and doubts when Jesus was arrested. They had fears and doubts when Jesus was crucified. They had fears and doubts as Jesus lay in the tomb on Saturday. They had fears and doubts when Jesus appeared to them alive on Easter. They still had fears and doubts when Jesus appeared to them the following Sunday in the locked room. And now they are back in Galilee, not sure what to do next, not seeing God's plan clearly, even after seeing the resurrected Christ two times. So, they go fishing.

When we see the weaknesses of the disciples, it is tempting to think that we see Jesus clearer than they did. It is tempting to think that we would have trusted everything that Jesus said about himself and never doubted when he was on the cross, never feared when he was in the grave and never been at a lost for what to do next after Jesus rose. If so, we would be looking at ourselves with rose colored glasses, filtering out the weakness of our faith, and the sinfulness of our hearts and minds. We are not better than the disciples. We don't have all the answers. We do not see everything clearly...yet. The only time when we will see clearly as we are seen is when we are with our Savior in heaven.

Until then, we confess that we have doubts and fears, and the strength of our faith fluctuates throughout life. What does God think of us when we prioritize our friends and wealth over him? What about when we use his name to curse, swear, lie or deceive? Is Christ still with us when we despise preaching and his word? What about when we dishonor or anger our parents and others in authority? Does Jesus still love me when I do not help and befriend my neighbor with every bodily need? And that is just half of the commandments. When we fail to keep his commands, do we turn to him in faith, trusting that Christ will forgive us. Or do we hide from God afraid that he might not?

Perhaps we have doubts when someone is sick, and we wonder why God would allow this illness to afflict our loved one. We look at the evil in this world and wonder if God is still in control. We look at our own lives and wonder why God hasn't blessed me like he has others? I wonder if God loves them more. And we may wonder what we are supposed to be doing in this life. Others seem to have such a clear vision for their purpose in life while I am wandering around like a person who has lost their glasses.

Jesus found the disciples as they were wandering back into their former way of life, fishing. Jesus had told the women on Easter morning to tell the disciples to go to Galilee and they would see him there. So, they were waiting for Jesus and Jesus found them in Galilee just as he promised. The Savior who died and rose to save them from sin and death would not abandon them in their doubts and fears and questions. He found them. He miraculously filled their nets with fish just as he had done when he called them to follow about three years before. He cleared up their spiritual vision and not one of them would ask who he was for they knew and believed that this was the same Jesus who died and now lived again. Jesus strengthened their weak faith and drove away their doubts and fears with his presence.

This same Jesus also died to pay for your sins and rose to guarantee your resurrection to eternal life. He will not abandon you in times of doubts and fears. He has not left you to figure it all out on your own with the clouded vision of human reason. But where are we to wait for the ever-living Christ to find us? We wait where he promises to meet us – in his Word and Sacraments. Just as he reminded the disciples of the first miraculous catch of fish, his Word takes us back to the wonderful stories of God's grace and promises kept to his people since Adam and Eve. He kept his promises to them. He will continue to keep his promises to forgive and comfort and guide his people today. The Word reminds us of what our God did when we were baptized. For he put his name on us, the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. We are his now and forever. He washed away our sins. He clothed us in the robe of Christ's perfect righteousness. Remember your baptism and the fear of being rejected or forgotten by God fades away. And in Holy Communion, our Savior finds us in a very special way. He gives his true body and blood to us in and with the bread and wine. The disciples got to see Jesus, touch Jesus and eat with Jesus. In Holy Communion, so do we. Our Savior finds us and delivers to us his undeserved love, forgiveness, strengthened faith and the certain hope of eternal life in this sacrament.

When we have sinned, when we have doubts, when we are afraid, when we don't see clearly – go to where Jesus promises to be. Go to his Word and Sacraments. And don't stop. For Jesus has not promised to deliver his grace to us in any other way and we will only stop needing his grace and forgiveness when we are brought into his eternal kingdom. Then faith will become perfect sight.

Amen.