

Easter 6 – May 9, 2010
2 King 6:15-17
Pastor Thomas Kneser

Brothers and sisters in Christ,

If it's happened once, it's happened a hundred times. My wife sends me down to the freezer to find something – a package of meat, some frozen vegetables, whatever. I'll go down into the basement and look and look and look some more. After a few minutes of digging through stuff, I'll come upstairs and ask her if we really have what she wanted me to get. Invariably she'll go look for herself and 99 times out of hundred she'll be back upstairs with the missing food in her hand. I usually end up saying, "I must be blind, because I didn't see it." Sometimes I've even accused her in jest of hiding stuff in other places and then sending me down so that I look foolish. I'll bet I'm not the only husband who can't find things that our wives know are there. And I'm sure that mothers would say that lots of children, my own included, seem to have this problem as well.

In the words before us today we see the servant of God's prophet Elisha afflicted with this same eye trouble, only in a much more serious matter. What he did see was a whole lot of enemy soldiers surrounding the town where he and his master were staying. He also knew that Elisha was the object of their evil intentions. With his physical eyes this servant saw only doom and disaster, sure and certain death. He didn't see any escape. That's when Elisha prayed, **O Lord, open his eyes so he may see.** That is the focus of our message for you as well, that all of you..

OPEN YOUR EYES TO SEE THE LORD'S POWER!

First we will recognize the fact that our physical eyes definitely do not reveal everything we need to see. Then we pray that the Lord open our eyes, the eyes of faith, so that we are always focused on him.

I.

Why was the Syrian army hunting down God's prophet in Israel? It's because God was revealing to Elisha exactly what the king of Syria and his army were up to. At this point in Israel's history, the Syrians were in a position of dominance over Israel and its king, Joram. God was allowing that to happen because Joram continued to follow in the footsteps of his father Ahab and his mother Jezebel when it came to the worship of the false god, Baal. Syrian raiding parties would come into Israel to plunder, carry away food and slaves. But God in his love was about to deliver his people, despite the wickedness of their king. While God did not overlook the sins of the leaders, his heart reached out to his people as he tried to woo them back, to lead them to repentance and faith. While there were thousands in Israel who still followed the Lord, there were many more who were following the shameful idolatry practiced by their king.

But for the sake of his people, through Elisha, God was protecting them. The Lord began to reveal the plans of the Syrian raiding parties to Elisha who then passed that information on to King Joram. Thus he could either move himself and his army out of harm's way or he could set an ambush and destroy the raiding parties. Either way, it didn't take long before the king of Syria got very frustrated and wondered who among his staff was a traitor, revealing his plans to the Israelites. He was told by one of his officers, **Elisha, the prophet who is in Israel, tells the king of Israel the very words you speak in your bedroom.** The God who knows all things, even the thoughts and plans of every man's heart, was revealing the information to his prophet who then used it to bring protection and security to God's people.

So the king of Syria sent out a strong force that included horses and chariots and they surrounded the town of Dothan where Elisha and his servant were staying. When Elisha's servant got up early in the morning, that's what he saw, all the forces of the Syrian army ready to come in to town to capture and kill Elisha. In his fear he asked, **Oh, my lord, what shall we do?**

Are we tempted to express our fears in the same way? What do we see with our eyes? All too often we focus only on the dangers and distress caused by sin. And they definitely are real and they are all around us.

There is the danger that screams from the headlines of our newspapers and leading off the TV newscasts. There is terrorism, this time narrowly averted again in New York City with the SUV bomber. There is the environmental disaster in the Gulf of Mexico with the leaking oil well. There are the natural disasters - tornadoes, floods, earthquakes. There is the violence and crime and immorality in our world and in our community. Two weeks ago I met with the mayor and city planner of West Allis and one of the things they said is that West Allis had the second most reports of domestic violence in the state, behind only Milwaukee. We see all these things happening and we might be led to cry out in fear as Elisha's servant did, **Oh, Lord, what shall we do?**

Or we also see the dangers that arise from within our own hearts, the power of sin that overwhelms us all too often. Look at our reading from Revelation today. That was written to Christians who were in danger of losing their faith because of complacency and apathy. They were gradually sliding away from the Lord, so he was about to spit them out of his mouth as something distasteful and disgusting. Is that where you are at in your relationship with God? Do you see your sinful nature getting the best of you all too often? How would Jesus evaluate your faith life right now? Maybe it's not as bad as King Joram's was, or as many of his people. Hopefully, there's no blatant idolatry or immorality, no sliding away in apathy or getting caught up in the rush for material things at the expense of our souls. But God uses his word to confront us point blank with sin, so that there is no getting around it, no trying to justify it because, well, "everyone else is doing it", or "how can it be wrong, pastor, if we love each other so much?" Without God's word we just wouldn't see the seriousness of our sins and the eternal consequences that will result if we continue in those sins.

II.

But what is it that we don't always remember, what we overlook with our physical eyes, or what can only be seen with the eyes of faith? When Elisha prayed that the Lord would open the eyes of his servant, that's when this young man got a glimpse into the spiritual world as he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha. God revealed to him the forces of his army, the angels of heaven who were ready to protect God's servant from any harm or danger at the hands of the Syrians. He was bolstered in his faith by his master's words, **Don't be afraid. Those who are with us are more than those who are with them.**

God was revealing to him that he and Elisha weren't going to be handed over, that God was in charge of the situation with his power and protection. He knows everything that is going on in the lives of his children and gives us all kinds of promises to comfort and reassure us, as we will see in a moment.

When the Syrian army marched into town to capture Elisha, he prayed and they were struck with what seems to have been a mental blindness or confusion as he was able to persuade them that they were not in the right place and that he was not the man they were looking for. Then he led them to the place where the Israelite king and his army were. The Syrians came to their senses and they were taken captive. Because of this incident the Syrians stopped raiding Israel's territory. God used this situation to demonstrate his love for his people, his power and his goodness. It was meant to draw them back to him, to renew their faith and devotion to the one true God, the one who had their best interests at heart.

That's precisely what God wants us to see with the eyes of faith, that he has our best interests at heart, both physically and spiritually. Most important is the fact that he doesn't leave us in our spiritual blindness, headed for the eternal darkness of hell. First, he gives us his law, which lays bare the fact that we are sinners and that without being rescued by God we will be separated from him for all eternity, that we will be lost forever.

But then he also reveals to us the beauty of the gospel, the good news that he sent his Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ, to rescue us from our lost condition, to free us from the spiritual forces of evil that surround us. Jesus took on those enemies of mankind during his 33 years on earth as he went toe to toe with

Satan. He faced down every attack, every temptation to give up on his mission. Then, even though he was innocent of sin, he shouldered the burden of our guilt and he went to the cross. He endured the punishment that should have been ours, doing battle and then winning the war. He declared from the cross, **It is finished.** Then to demonstrate his victory, he rose in triumph from the grave. Sin, death, Satan and hell were overcome. In his love Jesus sacrificed his life and in doing so, he won the war. Sin is forgiven. Heaven is open. Peace with God is ours through faith in his Son.

We see that and more as we go to the pages of our Bibles, as the Holy Spirit opens our spiritual eyes through the word and through the sacraments. Baptism opens our eyes as it renews and regenerates, giving us new birth, a new relationship with our loving God. Then we nurture that spiritual life by hearing and learning from the word, and by feeding our faith when we come in repentance to his holy supper. As our souls are refreshed with the message of forgiveness we see and feel God's presence in our lives. His love surrounds us and his promises give us hope and comfort and security.

One of those promises involves his holy angels, the horses and chariots of fire Elisha's servant saw. Those angels are there to guard and protect us, to keep danger away from us or to lessen its impact on us. Since the Bible tells us that there are literally millions of angels, we can be confident that many of them are here with us right now, ready to spring into action as they serve God by watching over his people.

And the Lord also uses the people we can see to open our eyes to his power and his love. Today/this weekend we are celebrating Mothers Day. Thank God for those Christian women who watch over their families, who nourish the faith of their children, who provide that love and support that all of us need to flourish as children of God. Honor those mothers and fathers by heeding their instruction to follow the Father of all of us and his Son, Jesus.

So the encouragement from our gracious God is always there to keep our eyes open to his power and protection and to trust his love and wisdom as we go through our lives. He wants us to have peace in our lives as we heard in our gospel readings. That peace comes as the Holy Spirit works in our hearts through the gospel, opening our eyes to all that God has done for us and promises to do for us in the future. That peace and security are ours first and foremost as we revel in the relationship of love with God through faith in Jesus. We can have the confidence that Elisha did that the forces of God are more numerous and more powerful than the forces that are threatening to drag us down, both physically and spiritually.

Now, this is not a guarantee that our lives will be free from distress. We are still sinners living in a sinful world where Satan has a lot of connections and there a lot of forces working to steal us away from our God. But let us always keep our eyes open, see our Savior's hand at work. That way we won't cry out in fear as Elisha's servant did. We can be confident that our loving Lord is with us every step of the way through life, that he surrounds us with his angels and with his love, no matter what the situation.

When things look bleak, when the outcome seems uncertain, don't always go by what your eyes and your mind are telling you. Go to the one who sees everything and who promises to help today as he did in the past. Go to your loving Lord and Savior. He will deliver as promised to bring us safely through to our heavenly home. Amen.