

Sermon – Genesis 2:15-17, 3:1-7; Matthew 4:1-11
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Grace Lutheran Church
1 Lent – Year A
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“Eyes Wide Shut”

Sisters and brothers in Christ, grace be unto you and peace in the name of God the Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

1. As someone who came of age in the 1990s, I did not grow up as a digital native. Without a world at my fingertips via smartphone or tablet, I had to actually go somewhere to interact with people. Like most other Americans growing up in suburban sprawl within what our coastal friends call flyover country, this meant I spent my time in a very specific place: the mall. I'd spend hours at the mall with my friends. What would we do during that time? Goodness knows. I'd probably spend a few arcade tokens at Pocket Change, fall into the Gap, thumb through some paperbacks at Waldenbooks, and grab a slice at Sbarro. After I'd gotten my first ear piercing (and yes, there was more than one), I'd invariably stop into Claire's. But this was all prelude to the main event. Eventually I would make my way to the Magic Eye kiosk. You remember this. Magic Eye made those posters that seemed to be nothing more than random two-dimensional patterns. However, if you looked at the image in just the right way, you would be able to see a three-dimensional image. Like a dinosaur or, perhaps, a sailboat. The trick was to diverge your eyes. Or so I've heard. Because truth be told, to this day I have never been able to see the picture supposedly hidden within the pattern. I would stare at those things endlessly, standing there with my coffee from Gloria Jean's and a vacant look on my face. But no matter how long I looked, my eyes simply could not see it. It turns out that there is more to seeing than simply looking.

2. The story of the garden is the story of increased sight but lost vision. Gifted with a paradise far exceeding that of a suburban shopping mall, Adam and Eve were blessed with everything they needed. This abundance is less material than it is relational. Created to live in relationship with God and one another, their life in the garden was one of faith. It is for this reason that God commanded them not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. It was not a capricious cookie jar scenario on God's part, a divine test to see if humanity would be obedient. No, they were not to eat of that particular tree because God yearned for humans to trust God alone, to let God show them what was good and evil, and to trust that God would always provide them with the good. But Adam and Eve just had to see for themselves, and so do we. For the story of the garden is *our* story of turning from God. It is a present-tense story, lived out in our sinful hearts every day. God created this world of abundance out of a desire to be in community with us. All God asks is our faithfulness, our trust that God will provide us with good and protect us from evil. But we just have to see for ourselves. While we are capable of seeing and distinguishing good from evil in this world's big picture, we are not God; we are not capable of consistently choosing the good. What do we get? The same thing Adam and Eve got – opened eyes but lost vision. Their first reaction upon seeing more clearly is to shut their eyes to one another, covering up under clothes and hiding from God. God's vision for us is turned into our division from one another and from God.
3. We need not look far to see how we have lost God's vision to our divisions. While we do not yet know what will come of the coronavirus, we have already seen a troubling side effect. Instances of racism and xenophobia against people of Asian descent. Some people in Australia are refusing to allow their children to be treated by Asian doctors. In New York and elsewhere, Chinese restaurants are being suddenly avoided. And one man in Los Angeles had to endure a tirade from a fellow subway passenger, including the claim that every disease comes from China because China is

- disgusting. Yes, we are good at seeing good and evil, but we have a hard time living into the vision of God's goodness.
4. These next nine months will provide ample opportunity to look at the big picture with sight but not vision. As we march toward the presidential election, we will increasingly hear that *only* this or that candidate or party has the answer for everything that we are facing as a nation. Don't believe it. Now, to be clear, I am not suggesting any sort of false moral equivalency as if some options weren't better than others. We face real challenges that need real solutions, and these should be openly debated in good faith. Even more, good is still good and evil is still evil. Because of our friends there, I pay a bit of attention to politics in Slovakia. In their elections this weekend, the far-right, neo-Nazi People's Party Our Slovakia won 8% of the vote. 8% of the electorate voted for a party whose platform is built upon demonizing Roma and Jews, whose leader once said that living under Hitler's rule was like living in heaven. This is wrong, and this is evil. The point for us is not that there are *not* worse options than others, but rather that there is danger in seeing one candidate as the ultimate answer to the problems of the day. To believe this is to lose the vision and deepen division among us. It's also idolatry. A president, after all, is many things, but he or she is not a Savior. We already have one of those and his term is not up.
 5. So it is that we see Jesus inverting and undoing the story of the garden. Whereas Adam and Eve were blessed with abundance and the presence of God, Jesus is driven by the Spirit to be alone and hungry. Satan finds him thus and tempts him. Satan paints a wonderful vision in the attempt to lure Jesus away from his faith in God. You're hungry, Jesus? So are so many others! Turn these stones to bread. You want to show what God can do in this world? Jump from the pinnacle of the temple and show how God will protect you. You want to reclaim God's rightful place as king in this world? Take the throne. All it will cost you is a bow in my direction. Jesus stands in our place and does

what we have failed to do. Yes, there is hunger in this world. Yes, there are things from which we need protecting. And yes, goodness knows this world would benefit from an understanding that the Lord is King. But it is up to God to determine when and how to be God, not us. And let's not forget that while we make things complicated, God's vision is pretty simple. If people are hungry, we don't need miracle bread. We just have to share the earth's abundance. If people are in danger, well, maybe they shouldn't be jumping off temples in the first place; more to the point, maybe rather than waiting on angels, God is depending on us to care for one another. And if people are worshipping anything other than God, perhaps we demonstrate a better way, beginning by putting our own trust and faith in God instead of ourselves. In these simple ways we can begin to undo divisions and catch God's vision for creation.

6. As we enter this season of Lent, we begin with Jesus in the wilderness. We know that his journey will lead him to the cross. In both the wilderness and the cross, Jesus stares down the devil by putting his faith in God alone. In resisting sin, he begins the work of forgiving our sin. As he does so, he becomes the new vision emerging from creation's confusion, the perfect image of God at work in and for the sake of a perfect world. The human project of knowing good and evil has led to too much evil. It is time to refocus our eyes upon God at work in Christ. Jesus knows what he's doing, and he alone can make sense of this world; he only can undo our divisions. With opened eyes of faith, look to Jesus. With renewed vision, follow him. Amen.

And now may the peace that passes all human understanding keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus, this day and forever. Amen.