

A picture is worth a thousand words and, yet, just a **few words** have the power to change the whole **picture**. In the movie Memento, the main character has lost his short-term memory. He constantly finds himself needing to refer to notes he has written for himself. Without those notes he would be clueless, but with them he understands things and can make his way forward. Having those few words changes the way he sees the world around him.

For us, God's Word, the Bible, changes the way we see the world around us. That's because true and living faith in God comes through hearing **His** Word. Listening to and taking to heart God's Word can have a huge impact on the way we look at the world. As we will see today, God's Word has the power to change the whole picture.

In our Old Testament reading, Isaiah repeatedly calls out for people to listen and take to heart God's Word. He wants to open people's ears because he knows that what they hear will change the world around them. Because of God's voice and His promise of salvation, the desert can blossom into a garden like Eden, their time of exile in Babylon can become an experience of hope, and the silence of sorrow can be chased away with songs of joy.

In today's Gospel, Jesus asks His disciples what others are saying about Him. Their voices create a certain **vision** of Jesus. He could be John the Baptist or Elijah or Jeremiah. But the voice of Peter offers a confession of faith that enables all who follow to see a clear and true vision of Jesus: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Mt 16:16). Faith comes by hearing. What we **hear** about God and the promises of His work changes what we see in the world around us. Voices lead to visions, visions of God's grace. In our Old Testament text, the prophet calls people then **and** now to **listen** to God's voice so that we can see the vision of God's grace.

Isaiah is prophesying to a people who will soon be in exile. To them, it would be easy to look back upon their history and see how their sin had destroyed God's promises. They once had a glorious city; their worship was vibrant. God had called and blessed them to be His own beloved people. But all that now lay in ruins. And the reason for it was their sin. They had no one to blame but themselves.

But then Isaiah enters this scene of devastation and lifts up his voice. He calls for people to close their eyes and **listen**, listen as he tells them of God's work in their history (v 1). The LORD calls them to look back to Abraham and Sarah, wandering in search of a new home and barren, downcast that they

were now old and had no children. Yet, out of these two strangers in a strange land, God brought about an entire nation. The voice reveals the power of God to bring many out of one (v 2) and, ultimately, to work **all** things to restore His creation (v 3).

There's a good reason why in Isaiah 51 God calls again and again for His people, including us today, to **listen** to Him. It's so tempting for us to **not** want to listen to His Word of good news when it's so much easier to believe the **bad** news that **surrounds** us. It's easy to let all our worries and our negative thoughts distract us from God and cause us to doubt that He'll really take care of us and our loved ones. God knows this and that's why He calls out over and over again for us to listen to **His** voice, His Word, where His Holy Spirit is powerfully at work and to follow Him. It's for this very reason that in Matthew chapter 6 Jesus says, "Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? Your heavenly Father knows (what) you need. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well."

We all have felt the hard pinch of inflation over the past couple of years, nevertheless we still definitely live in a land of plenty. Our lives, both physically and spiritually, truly have been richly blessed by God.

That's not to say that as individuals we can't be exiled from God if we choose to ignore His voice and leave Him out of the picture, like the Old Testament Israelites. The prophet Jeremiah had it right when he prayed, "I know, O LORD, that man's life is not his own; it is not for man to direct his steps" (Jeremiah 10:23). Our efforts to establish a comfortable life can easily blind us to God's vision and leave us in sin. And so Isaiah's calls to listen, comes to **us** as well.

When **Israel** looked to the Rock, (just like Isaiah directed them) they saw Abraham and the power of God to make many from one. Today, **we** look to the rock of our salvation, Jesus Christ. In Him, God has fulfilled His work begun in Abraham. From the One Who died and rose again, Jesus, God has forgiven us our sins and raised us up to be part of the community of the faithful that listens to Him.

In verse four of our reading, Isaiah extends his call beyond the faithful remnant in Israel to **all** peoples, that includes **all** races (v 4). He says God's "justice will become a light to the peoples." The works of God extend to all people, and His salvation reaches to the ends of the earth (v 5). You and I right

here today are part of this vision. **We** are the “coastlands” who now look to God and wait in hope. Isaiah’s voice opens our eyes to God’s mission, which extends to the ends of the earth.

God’s mission continues for us here and now, right where we’re at, as we invite family, friends, and neighbors to join us for worship. Two weeks from right now a brand-new year of Christian Education begins at First Lutheran Church. Not only is this a great way to reach out with the Good News of Jesus to young ones in Sunday school but for people of all ages through Bible studies, youth groups, and more.

And of course, this Tuesday we begin our 139th year of Christian education at First Lutheran School! What an absolute blessing to have this opportunity for young people to be given a firm grounding in the faith of Christ, as they study about God’s wonderful creation! All of these are ways for us to grow and be strengthened in our faith in God, the rock of our salvation at First Lutheran Church and School!

People of all ages, members of First Lutheran and others in our town need to hear the voice of Jesus and see His vision of forgiveness, peace, love, and eternal life for them. Yes, God’s mission continues right here among us today.

Isaiah offers us a wonderful vision of hope for us to share. As we look to the heavens and the earth and confess that because of our sin this world we live in indeed will not last, Isaiah asks us to listen to God. God speaks of His salvation, which will last **forever** and His righteousness which will never fail (v 6b).

The work that God has done in Christ, the righteousness that He has given to you, will never fade or perish or be taken away. That gift He first gave to you in your Baptism will keep you in His care now and always.

Our Old Testament Reading opens with people seeking the Lord (v 1). By the end of the Reading, the Lord is **revealed**. That’s the power of God’s voice. Whatever burdens you carry this day, listen to the voice of God from Isaiah. It opens your eyes to see God’s salvation at work, in the past, in the present, and in the future. Amen.