

**The Fifth Sunday after Epiphany
February 7 & 8, 2026
Pastor Scott Klimke
American Lutheran Church**

Isaiah 58:1-12

1 Corinthians 2:1-16

Matthew 5:13-20

It's been said that seeing a sentence takes no time at all, but deeply and clearly hearing what we've seen takes much, much longer, if it ever happens. This big difference between first impressions and actual knowledge may explain why Christians have for so long gathered around words read from a holy book. With the word of God calling for our ears so often, maybe, just maybe, we'll learn how to hear better over time. And should this happen, it will be important. Our common good can only reach its fullest potential if all people and ideas can receive a fair hearing and each and every fair hearing requires the ability to hear deeply and clearly. But first we have to want to hear a symphony of voices, God's included, and this is far from guaranteed.

As a case in point, I recently ran across the results of an international survey in the Wall Street Journal. They suggest a fair hearing might be hard to get these days. The survey polled about 34,000 people in 28 countries and here's what it found. It found we live at a time when pretty much the world over only about 30% of us are willing to hear people who come at things differently than we do. With less than a third of us presently willing to give others a fair hearing, it just may be that most of us aren't even trying to hear anymore. Whoever said the hearing so necessary for the pursuit and practice of our common good was easy needs to learn about just how deaf to the other we can be; God included. And our reading from Isaiah tells us we shouldn't go thinking our being deaf to God and others is anything new.

Today's reading from Isaiah comes from the third part of the book. In the first part, God's people are called to repent. They're called to hear God more deeply and clearly so that they might start to hear the neighbors they've been ignoring more deeply and clearly. This is how it always goes in the Bible. Scripture never fails to say that you're not hearing God until you're hearing all the cries of distress around you. To quote the epistle of 1st John, as one representative example, anyone who says they love God as they fail to love the neighbor they can see is a liar. But just because God is clear and consistent how the love of God and the love of neighbor are two sides of the same coin doesn't mean we'll be ready to hear God deeply and clearly. In the first part of Isaiah. God's people fail to hear God because they fail to hear every cry of distress. It's not much longer before the civilization that God addresses in the first of Isaiah predictably falls to pieces and is carted off to a foreign land.

But then in the second part of Isaiah God's people are given another chance. Because God is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, God's people are raised from what might as well be death and given another opportunity to rebuild their lives and the Holy Land. One would think that after having been burned so badly by a failure to hear God previously, God's people would now be all ears. But as we get to the third part of the book from which today's reading from Isaiah is drawn, we learn this isn't the case. Back in the Holy Land by God's free and unmerited grace alone, God's people are no different than when they first paid such a high cost for turning a deaf ear to God's call to care for the entirety of the world God loves. Back in the Holy Land by God's free and unmerited grace alone, today's reading from Isaiah informs us that God's people are back to not hearing again. Whoever said the hearing so necessary for our common good is easy is out of touch with our present moment and needs to learn more about the Bible. In their repeated failure to hear God deeply and clearly, the people in

our reading from Isaiah confirm what I've already said once today. Though it takes no time at all to see a sentence, it takes much longer for us to hear what's actually being said, if we ever hear it. And there's definitely a sentence in our reading from Matthew which we don't want to give a superficial glance. This is a sentence that calls for deep and clear hearing.

The sentence I have in mind is the one that finds Jesus saying you and I and the rest of the Church are the light of the world. In making this claim, Jesus is demonstrating that he has done some deep and clear hearing of his own. If there was an Old Testament book that Jesus seems to have heard particularly well, it was the book of Isaiah. As you might recall, when Jesus in another gospel is given the opportunity to read Scripture in his hometown synagogue at Nazareth, he doesn't open the scroll to Genesis, to the psalms, or to Jeremiah, Ezekiel, or Malachi. At Nazareth, Jesus opens the scroll to Isaiah and hears Isaiah's words as words about himself; as words which say the Spirit of the Lord has come upon him so that there might good news for the poor, release for the captives, sight for the blind, and freedom for the oppressed. And lo and behold when Jesus calls you and me and the rest of the Church the light of the world today, he goes back to Isaiah again; this time hearing some of the prophet's words as words about us. And what are these words of Isaiah that Jesus hears as words about us? They go like this. First through Isaiah and now through Jesus, God says in reference to us, "I shall give you as a light to the nations that my salvation may reach the end of the earth." Again, first through Isaiah and now through Jesus, God says in reference to us, "I shall give you as a light to the nations that my salvation may reach the end of the earth." Oh, what an honor and a privilege it is to be called the light of the world today. Through us, God's going to save the entire world so that there might be a new creation where death and crying and mourning and pain are no more. But let's not get

cocky or apathetic. Being the light of the world doesn't just happen. It's the result of hearing God deeply and clearly and this won't happen unless we also hear Jesus deeply and clearly.

In today's reading from Matthew, it's said that Jesus is the perfect interpreter and implementer of every last thing God says to us in Scripture. Connecting the dots here is as essential as it is easy. To hear God deeply and clearly is always to hear Jesus deeply and clearly. And in a world filled with an awful lot of noise this is something we overlook at our peril and the peril of the world God is using us to save. In a world filled with an awful lot of noise, the voice of Jesus is the voice we'll hear first, last, and in-between when we're the light of the world. But as the voice of God that once came to Elijah was still and small so too is the voice of Jesus still and small today. In a world filled with an awful lot of noise, you're just not going to hear Jesus unless you know how to hear deeply and clearly. It's not that Jesus is inconsistent or unclear. Jesus is consistent and he's clear as a bell. The problem is that many have come and still come in the name of Jesus to deceive us and we have a habit and history of being duped by them. They tell us what we want to hear rather than what we need to hear and we all too often embrace the dishonest affirmation rather than the truth Jesus conveys.

These days our friends on social media throw information at us all the time. We should never assume this tsunami of information conveys Jesus at his clearest and most consistent. Sometimes it will and sometimes it won't. These days, preferred news channels, favorite publications, and admired public figures pour it on thick. We should never assume they speak for Jesus. Sometimes they will and sometimes they won't. These days churches can sound as if they're not hearing the same Jesus. It's because they're not. Sometimes Jesus is preached and taught and sometimes he's not and this goes back as far as the Bible too. And so, as much as it's possible for lifelong sinners like you and me, may this be our practice and our pursuit at

American Lutheran Church of Sun City, Arizona. In, by, and through the Holy Spirit, may our first resort and our last resort and every in-between resort be to hear Jesus deeply and clearly not only when he comforts us clear as a bell, but also when he challenges us clear as a bell. For it shall be then that God and God's two spokespeople Isaiah and Jesus will say of us, "Yeah! I told you so! I've given them as a light to the nations that my salvation may reach the end of the earth." Amen!