

2 Kings 6:15-17

Easter 6, Supplement Series C, May 1, 2016

Theme: Lord, open my eyes!

I. So I may see the dangers that surround me

II. So I may trust your powerful protection

INJ We often have our attention on our devices, don't we? The phone steals our eyes from the sidewalk when we are walking. Have you ever seen someone walk into something when they were texting? The temptation is to look at the phone when we are driving, and tragedy can happen. Just a quick check of the notification during dinner kills the conversation. Do you watch television while you eat?

With our eyes fixed on a screen, we don't talk to each other. We don't notice what is going on. We can't see dangers looming. We miss the clues when people communicate. We aren't blind, but we cannot see. Such was the problem in our lesson, long before electronics. Like the servant of Elisha the prophet, we need this prayer: Lord, open my eyes so I may see the dangers that surround me, and so I trust your powerful protection.

The Bible History lesson before us deals with the prophet Elisha and the enemy armies of Aram. The king of Aram warred against Israel, and set his traps to ambush the Israelite patrols. But the LORD revealed those plans to Elisha, and he passed the information on to the king of Israel. Time after time, the people of God avoided danger because their king was forewarned.

The king of Aram was frustrated, and found out that Elisha was the source. He sent a delegation to capture the prophet. They went at night with horses and chariots and a strong force of soldiers, and surrounded the city where Elisha was. Early in the morning, when Elisha's servant awoke and discovered their predicament, you can understand his fear. The city was surrounded, not just by armed men, but also by those with horses and chariots! They could not escape or run away or hide or blend in with the crowd. "What shall we do?" was the servant's cry. It was hopeless. It didn't even seem that God could save their lives.

Do you feel that way sometimes? It isn't even fair, because all you have been doing is minding your own business. You have been trying your best to live a Christian life, to follow God's Word, to live in repentance and faith. You are not an agitator or a complainer, but the opposition is allied against you and it looks hopeless. What shall we do?

We might prefer to stick our heads in the sand and ignore the problems. Maybe they will go away? If I say something it will only make things worse? I won't touch that topic and they won't come after me? You

know how foolish it is to close your eyes to danger. Like texting and driving! Lord, open our eyes to see the dangers that surround us.

The sinful world opposes God at every turn. It lays traps for us. We have become so desensitized to sinful sexual activity that we hardly notice how prevalent it is. Increasingly graphic details are commonplace. The current discussion is about how horrible it is to distinguish genders in the bathroom! If we accept the premise of the world, then we are soon to despise God and his wise and wonderfully fitting creation. If we are just accidents in history then nothing is right or wrong, there is no sin, and no one needs a Savior. The godless world wants to destroy our Christian viewpoint. What shall we do against this fearsome enemy?

Another enemy is doubly dangerous. It presents itself as just the answer to our concerns about the world. If only we had the right political leader, the correct laws, or the proper enforcement, then we Christians would be all set. Life will be sweet if we vote for this person over that one. Problems will melt away if we boycott one business or sign a petition for a bill. The danger is not that we become involved in the political process. The danger is thinking that politics is our savior, our best way out of the mess.

The deadliest enemy really lies within our own hearts. My sinful nature rebels against God's holiness. I want to do things my way. I would rather not listen. I offer deadly excuses (it makes me feel good; no one gets hurt; it doesn't matter). That persistent enemy of God, my heart, pushes my buttons and drags its feet. Don't close your eyes to the problem, but recognize where the enemy dwells – inside! When we see the overwhelming threats to our faith, we cry out like Elisha's servant: "What shall we do?"

I know the natural reactions we have to danger. We want to hide, curl up in a ball, and hope it disappears. It won't. Terror is paralyzing. We could put up our fists and prepare to fight. With steely resolve and true grit we do what little we can before we are overwhelmed. Maybe it will make a difference. Probably not. Our life is not a scripted show or a fairy tale with a satisfying resolution at the end, where we live happily ever after.

Do you know Mr. Magoo? He was a cartoon character from the 60's who was nearsighted. The character was redone in the 90's. Mr. Magoo had many adventures because he could not see clearly. Amazingly, danger is averted at the last moment, every time, and the story resolves peacefully. Our lives are not charmed that way, nor are we drawn by friendly cartoon artists or computer generated sequences. God would open our eyes so we see not only the dangers that surround us, but his gracious promises. He wants us to trust his powerful protection.

"What shall we do?" Do you recall the answer the prophet Elisha

gave? It wasn't a last-ditch plan to create a distraction and trip up the chariots and make a dash for freedom. It wasn't a pessimistic tirade about how this wouldn't have happened if "someone" would have done his job better. "What shall we do?" "Don't be afraid." That was the answer to what we should do! We should not be afraid.

It sounds so simple. But who can fail to be terrified when the danger is so obvious and death is imminent? How could Prophet Elisha not tremble before the surrounding horses, chariots, and warriors? His comment is logical and rational, even though the servant could not see: "Don't be afraid." "Those who are with us are more than those who are with them." The confidence of anyone in battle is that we have more than they do. If our enemy is the devil, the world, and our sinful flesh, and they surround us and press hard against us, who is on our side? Who is with us to calm our fears? God tells us in his word that we have everything we need.

Jesus is with us. Don't be afraid. He defeated the devil. Against every temptation Jesus remained pure. In every circumstance he relied on the Heavenly Father. Since Jesus died and rose again, Satan has no power over us. He must flee before victorious Jesus.

The world and its insidious ignorance is just as powerless against Jesus. We need nothing from the world, for our Savior provides all our needs. He has forgiven our sin. He fills us with faith. He gives our bodies daily bread. He proclaims his gospel word and pours out his Holy Spirit on us. The world has been overcome by Jesus.

Even our sinful nature has been killed. It died when God gave us faith, when he put a new nature in us that trusts Jesus. It dies again every time we repent of sin and rely on God's promise of forgiveness. The enemies that oppose us are not invincible! Jesus is with us. He is more than those who are against us. We have victory in his name. Don't be afraid!

In addition to Jesus, the Father sends his holy angels to serve and protect believers. Our Bible History lesson gives us a breathtaking image to hold in our hearts when we are beset by fear. Elisha prayed that God would open the eyes of his servant to see the truth, that "those who are with us are more than those who are with them." Suddenly the servant saw, and his fear evaporated. "He looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha."

We don't normally see God's angels, but he promises that they watch over us. How many of them there are, we are not told, but, "those who are with us are more than those who are with them."

The most solid confidence we have is not that we can imagine hills full of fiery chariots. It is not that we hope for mighty angels to intervene.

What God has promised is certain. He says in the Bible that the victory is ours through Jesus Christ our Lord. We hold to his words, and we believe them. Remember the warning God gave to the church in Laodicea in our second lesson? Don't be lukewarm about God's words. Lukewarm is for spitting out. Lukewarm is apathy and unbelief. God's promises are the answer to our fear. His Word is our life! We are not afraid.

When fear does its thing, and it sneaks into your heart, go back to what God says. A hymn summarizes it like this: "Christ has died! Christ is risen! Christ will come again!" We see God's deliverance in the Sacrament of Holy Baptism. Today we have the privilege of baptizing a baby. Consider the enemies that surround her! Yet God does a mighty miracle with water connected to his word. You cannot see the Holy Spirit's activity, but the Spirit puts faith into that heart. He makes a dead, blind, unbelieving baby into a child of God. He announces forgiveness of sin. He opens heaven.

Don't be afraid! God has done the same thing for you. You may not remember your baptism, but God did the miracle there. You are his dear child by faith. Those who are with you are more than those who are with the enemy! And if it seems overwhelming still, then come to the Lord's Supper for comfort and assurance. With his body and blood, Jesus gives you peace. Do not be afraid! Lord, open our eyes so we see your promises and trust your powerful protection. We see, and we hear, and we believe.

What happened to Elisha and his servant? The rest of the story is this: As the enemy army rushed to attack, Elisha prayed that their eyes be closed. The LORD struck them all blind. Then the prophet kindly told the blinded Arameans that they were on the wrong path. "Follow me," he said, "and I will show you the way." Elisha led the blinded army into the capital city where they were surrounded by Israelites. Then the Lord opened their eyes and they saw their predicament.

Think about their fear! They had no LORD to save them. They had no promise to trust! All who rely on idols, who reject the LORD our Triune God, who war against him, or who ignore his powerful words, have no hope. Yet this was not the end of those Arameans. Elisha commanded the Israelite king to feed the prisoners of war and to send them home. Not to kill them, but to show mercy. As the Lord has had mercy on us.

The dangers that surround us are real, and deadly. Sin and Satan and the sinful world seek to tear you away from Jesus. Watch out for them with wide open eyes. Be on guard against their tricks. Prepare, and be ready for the battle, for it will be fierce. But, don't take your eyes off God's promises. Open your ears to hear of Jesus. He has won the victory! Lord, open my eyes, so I may see and trust your salvation. SDG Amen.