

Quinquagesima
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at the Chapel of the Cross, Luther Seminary
St. Paul, Minnesota

+ Jesu juva +

BLINDNESS TO SIGHT

Luke 18:31-43; Isaiah 35:3-7

Grace, mercy and peace be unto you from God the Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen

Taking His twelve closest disciples aside, Jesus tells them plainly about His Passion and Resurrection. “Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of Man will be accomplished. For He will be delivered to the Gentiles and will be mocked and insulted and spit upon. They will scourge Him and kill Him. And the third day He will rise again.”

Jesus was no helpless victim. He knew exactly what was going to happen to Him, and He chooses to enter into it. It is astonishing to us that a person would go willingly to the fate that awaited Jesus, to mockery, scourging, torment, crucifixion and death. But that is just what Jesus does. He sets forth on the path to Jerusalem and to His Passion willingly and freely. He does so in obedience to the Father and to His mission as Messiah; for this was indeed, as Jesus indicates foretold by the prophets; and for this is the reason He has been sent: to become a man like other men, to suffer and die as a man for all men, to rise to life again as a man that faithful men might also rise to life. He does it not only out of obedience and faithfulness, but out of love for us. So He goes to lay down His life that He may take it up again, as He has said in John’s Gospel. “My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father.”

It is not the first time that Jesus has told them about this. He has spoken specifically of this at least two times before, and, according to St. Matthew probably more often than that, for Matthew says that after Peter confessed that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the Living God, Jesus, “From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day.” That first time, Peter objected, rebuking Jesus and saying: “Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!” The second time that Matthew records Jesus telling them these things He reports that they reacted with sorrow. Jesus said: “Now while they were staying in Galilee, Jesus said to them, ‘The Son of Man is about to be betrayed into the hands of men, and they will kill Him, and

the third day He will be raised up.’ And they were exceedingly sorrowful.” Now this third time Jesus tells them about His impending passion, and Luke says this about the disciples reaction: “But they understood none of these things; this saying was hidden from them, and they did not know the things which were spoken.”

At first His words are met with rejection and rebuke, then with sorrow, and now with incomprehension. Why were these saying hidden from them so that they did not grasp the things which were spoken? There is nothing mysterious about what Jesus was saying, nothing cryptic, nothing difficult to understand. These words were hidden from them because they chose to be blind to the truth. They believed that Jesus was the Messiah and the Son of God, but they didn’t want to believe that He would suffer and die and rise again. The concept was so foreign to their hopes. so contrary to their expectations, that Luke speaks of it as being hidden from them. And yet the prophets had foretold that the Messiah would suffer for the sake of the people, that He would die, and that He would rise again. But this was a message they did not want to receive. And so they didn’t. Because they wouldn’t. They chose to be comfortably blind rather than see what they didn’t want to believe.

Then Jesus is leading them up to Jerusalem, and they encounter a blind man begging to be healed. The prophet Isaiah foretold such things: “‘Be strong, do not fear! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God; He will come and save you.’ Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped.” So the blind man, upon learning that Jesus was passing by on the road cries out: “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” But the disciples and the others following Jesus try to silence the man, warning him to be quiet. Again they show forth their blindness to Jesus work as the Messiah. For the healing of the blind is also in fulfillment of prophecy. They should out to Him to be silent, threatening Him, warning Him. But he won’t be quiet. St. Luke tells us: “but he cried out all the more, ‘Son of David, have mercy on me!’”

Jesus stops and has the man brought to Him. They would push the man away, but Jesus draws him near. Commands them, even, to bring him near. And then Jesus speaks to him, asking: “What do you want Me to do for you?” The blind man asks to have his eyesight restored. And Jesus heals him at once, saying: “Receive your sight; your faith has saved you.” (The original Greek here speaks of saving, rather than of healing.)



And how does Jesus know that this man had faith in Him? The man calls Him by name so we know that the man must have known something about Jesus. He also calls Him Son of David. This is more than a reference to Jesus ancestry (though it is certainly not detached from it) for there were probably many people among the Jews who could trace their ancestry back to David. Think about it. David had at least 20 sons, and probably several more, and likely many daughters. Most of those had offspring, who again likely had multiple children, and so on and so forth for about a thousand years. There must have been thousands of people who were descended from King David (just as today thousands of people can trace their descent back to famous rulers from 1000 years ago). So when this blind man calls Him, "Jesus, Son of David" he is indicating his faith that Jesus is the promised Messiah and king of Israel. But this Son of David is more than an earthly king. For the prophecies concerning the Son of David also speak of His being God Himself. Psalm 132 alludes to this: "The Lord has sworn in truth to David; He will not turn from it: 'I will set upon your throne the fruit of your body'... For the Lord has chosen Zion; He has desired it for His dwelling place." And Jeremiah makes it explicit: "I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness; a King shall reign and prosper... Now this is His name by which He will be called: THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS." And this too the blind man believed, for He not only calls Jesus "Son of David," but addresses Him as Lord: "Κύριε, ἵνα ἀναβλέψω." Lord, that I may see again. Just as we pray to the Lord: "Kyrie eleison" Lord have mercy.

Yes this man who could not physically see Jesus standing before Him, had crystal clear spiritual sight, seeing in Jesus the fulfillment of the promises made through the prophets of old, the Messiah come to save mankind, the Messiah who was both the Son of David and the Son of God. And this is why Jesus says to Him. "Your faith has saved you" His faith saved Him because His faith was in the right person, His faith was in Jesus.

I find it so ironic that the disciples who likewise believed Jesus to be Son of God and Messiah could not see when it came to Christ's passion. And yet this man who was physically blind, sees so much more clearly than they. And so as Jesus makes His way up to Jerusalem to be delivered to the Gentiles, to be mocked, to be insulted and spit upon, to be scourged and killed, and to rise again the third day, this man follows Him: "And immediately he received his sight, and followed Him, glorifying God."

This Jesus who has suffered and died and has risen again and lives, has fulfilled the words of the prophets concerning us as well. For we were once among the spiritually blind, unable to see the Kingdom of God, unable to know Christ, because we were at enmity with God on account of sin - with which we were born and in which we lived. But Christ Jesus commanded that we be brought to Him. And in Holy Baptism by the power of His promise attached to the sacramental waters, He created us anew and caused us to be reborn. And now we can see. For He tells us in John's Gospel: "unless one is born again, he cannot

see the kingdom of God.” We are blessed to have witnessed this miracle of renewal and rebirth by the Holy Spirit again today in the baptism of little Hendrick. Again a child born spiritually blind is made to see. But Jesus has done more than give us sight. He has also given us hearing and speech, as prophesied by Isaiah. Sight that we may see and know the truth. Hearing that we may be strengthened through His Holy Word. Speech, that like the formerly blind man, we may follow Him and glorify God.

And now we are preparing to make our way, ceremonially at least, to Jerusalem to witness again the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ. Let us be eager to follow Him, quick to repent of our sins and of any spiritual blindness that clings to us and hinders our sight of Him, and eager to confess and glorify Him in our speech and in our actions. Such seeing, hearing and speaking is empowered by His Gospel alone. And so above all else, let us be eager and quick to hear His Word. For through His Word, as He with His Sacraments, our Lord comes to us to heal us, to strengthen our faith in Him, to bring us the fruits of His suffering, dying and rising, to save us. Now to Him be all glory and praise with the Father and the Holy Spirit, forever and ever. Amen.

+ Soli Deo gloria +