

Quinquagesima, 2006

Text: Luke 18:31-43

Trinity Lutheran, Worden, IL & Zion Lutheran, Carpenter, IL

Pastor H. R. Curtis

X Grace, Mercy, and Peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ X

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

In the Kingdom of God having sight is no guarantee that you will see. For behold the disciples today. They are blind. They have been with Jesus for a long time now. It is toward the end of our Lord's earthly walk and he has set his face resolutely toward Jerusalem. He tells the disciples why he is going there: to suffer and die and rise again. He tells them plainly. And they do not see. They are blinded by their own ideas of what the Kingdom of God should be like. We see this throughout the Gospels. Jesus says he will suffer, Peter replies: it will never be! Jesus speaks of his humiliation at the hands of the Gentiles, and all James and John want to hear about is who will be on his right and on his left when he enters his Kingdom. Jesus talks the way of the cross, the disciples want the way of glory and ease.

And have you not stood in the place of the disciples here? Are you always eager to hear that the Kingdom of God means hardship and suffering? Or do you turn a blind eye to what the Kingdom of God requires? For it requires all. It requires that you love and trust God more than you love and trust yourself. It requires that you see with God's eyes, not your own, and trust his Word. God says he loves a cheerful and generous giver to the work of his kingdom – do you hold back because you trust your financial judgment better than his, because you see with your eyes money going out and no visible benefit coming in? God says love your spouse and forsake all others – but you trust your own ideas, and thus still your eyes linger on lustful images wherever you may find them. God says love your enemies and bless those who curse you – but have you even mastered showing love to your own family? Do you not rather curse those nearest to you with harsh looks, cruel words, and gossip behind their backs?

Thus, like the disciples, in seeing you are blind, in seeking ease you have found a deeper hardship. For you have turned a blind eye to God's Law. All sin stems from a lack of trust in God – and therefore all sin is idolatry. For what you fear most and trust most is your god. Yours might be money, or sex, or power, or your own fragile ego. But in trusting yourself and your ways more than you trust God you will find only a deeper hardship and a darker blindness. You may think that it is easier

to go your own way, to try to avoid Jesus and his cross, but his is the only path that leads to life.

Therefore, repent of your sight. Turn away from judging by appearances, by the way things look to your fallen, sinful reason and instead learn to see from this blind man at Jericho. For this man, though blinded in his eyes, sees with the sight of faith. He trusts Jesus and clings to him as his only hope. To all appearances, the blind man has no hope. There is no cure for his blindness. Thus do the crowds tell him to just leave Jesus alone. But faith cannot be cowed. Faith is simple trust in God, that what he wants is best. Thus the blind man does not even ask for anything. He does not ask for riches, so that he might not have to beg. He does not ask revenge on those in the crowd who were so cruel to him. He does not even ask for his sight – instead he calls out, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"

That is the call of faith. He trusts Jesus and his Word. He believes that Jesus is the Greater Son of David whose throne is eternal and who has come to usher in the Kingdom of God. And, what is more, he trusts in the Lord's mercy. He trusts that the Lord is good and that whatever the Lord considers merciful is what will be best. Thus faith brings no demands – only empty hands ready to receive mercy from the Lord.

Thus did the blind man see what the disciples missed: Jesus is the promised Messiah here to do mercy in his own way, not the ways of men. The ways of men are power and cruelty and violence. The way of Jesus is the way of Love, which as the Apostle says is patient and kind and does not insist on its own rights. Thus did Jesus, who is God, who is Love suffer patiently on the cross doing the kindness of his Father's will to all humanity. This suffering Love, this crucified God, can only be glimpsed by the eyes of faith. To the blind Pharisees and Saducees the crucifixion was proof that Jesus was a blasphemer. But the eyes of faith see on the cross the God who became man dying for the sins of the world, only to rise again on the third day for our salvation.

A God who loves this much, who pours out himself for others, cannot but do mercy and goodness to us. This was the blind man's belief. And the Church has learned from this blind man how to believe and how to pray, for the very first prayer of the Divine Service is the Kyrie Eleison – Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy, Lord have mercy. We bring no other demand. We seek only God's mercy – for that will be what is best.

And thus abandoning the ways of the world and giving up on his sight did the blind man receive his sight. For he who seeks to keep his life will lose it, but he who loses his life for Christ's sake will find it. The Lord gives the blind man his sight for Jesus came to show all the world that men should not

be blind, that men should not die, that there should not be death and disease and pain and sorrow. He came to show that though our sin had brought all this in to the world, still he is merciful and does not want these things for us. Rather he came to take all the blindness and cancer and arthritis and the pain over children who died too young and parents who suffered too long – he came to take it all into himself and provide real and eternal healing. The healing of this blind man was but a foretaste of the feast to come when Jesus shall return and give resurrected life to all who trust in him.

And this new life has dawned in your life, too, dear Christian. Oh, I'll admit it does not look like it: for this new life came to you in Baptism. And Baptism does not appear to be of any worth. Just some water sprinkled over a baby and a few words spoken by a man in funny robes. No shafts of light stream down from heaven, no doves appear, no flames of fire, no ecstatic speech take place. To the eyes of sight, it is but a quaint sign, a nice way to acknowledge the gift of a newborn child.

But the eyes of faith see something else. They see God's promise attached to these waters: that he who is born of water and the Spirit enters eternal life, that baptism buries us in Christ's death and raises us in his resurrection, that this is a washing not just in water but in the Holy Spirit. Thus at your baptism, dear Christian friend, the gates of heaven opened and the angels sang and rejoiced over one lost sinner restored to the Kingdom of God.

As with the Sacrament of Baptism, so with the Sacrament of the Altar. It takes eyes of faith to see God's miracles and receive their blessings. For he has chosen to call his miracles into being through his Word. To outer appearances, to the eyes of this world, the Lord's Supper is a strange and blasphemous ritual where we kneel down and adore bread and wine. But the eyes of faith see the Word of the Lord and believe. The same God who said "Let there be light" also says "This is my body" – and what he says goes, whether it looks like it or not. Thus our Lord Jesus Christ promises to be present in all his resurrected fullness under the appearance of bread and wine. Thus the Lord is there in his Supper to put right into our bodies and souls the very fullness of his body and soul and divinity. What a gracious and life-giving miracle! This miracle is what the eyes of faith long to see. Hasten back to this altar to receive this miracle once again next week.

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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Now the peace of God which passes all understanding will keep

your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.
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