

Quinquagesima: February 23, 2020
“By Faith Alone”

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God, our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. On our last Sunday before Lent, we reflect upon another *sola* recalled by the Reformation—*sola fide*—faith alone. Our text is the Gospel lesson Luke 18. Jesus tells His disciples of His upcoming betrayal, crucifixion, and resurrection. They didn’t quite grasp it. Jesus draws near to Jericho where a physically blind man confesses his faith, and is commended by Jesus, **“Your faith has saved you.”**¹

What is faith? **“Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”**² Faith is a saving thing. It is not powerless, weak, or ineffective. It is not irrelevant, since everyone needs salvation.

For all who have the sinful nature, they believe they do not need saving. They think that they are just fine. They are good people, or so they say. They are self-sufficient. This is how blindness talks. Only blindness could say that we are good people, when we pour out iniquities all day long. Only blindness could convince myself that I am a good person, while at the same time trying to justify my sins by comparing them to yours.

The problem is our sinful flesh is always blind. Ever since Eve used her eyes to covet that which did not belong to her; and Adam failed to be satisfied with what was given to him, our eyes have been easily deceived. Ever since Adam stood by while the tempter lured his wife and the whole human race into sin and destruction, we have failed to notice when spiritual danger is near. Although we may dimly glimpse the wickedness of man, or even our own wickedness, our flesh never quite grasps the full depravity of the corrupted human nature. We cannot accurately discern our sinful condition on our own.

As Christians, we recognize our condition, although not from our own abilities. The Word of God reveals it. The Spirit convicts us of our sins. By the grace of God, He opens our eyes. So, we recognize that without God, we are helplessly blind and unable to function. Without God, we cannot perceive the Law of God.

¹ Luke 18:42

² Hebrews 11:1

Without Him, we cannot follow the way of salvation. By ourselves, we are liable to stray upon the wrong paths.

Even though the moral law is written by God upon the hearts of all mankind, we still have difficulty recognizing the commandments. We do not recognize them in our daily lives when we have difficulty understanding what is right and wrong. This is even apart from the question of whether we keep the commandments. Every day, we break commandments without even realizing it. We are like an untrained blind man, stumbling around in a room, knocking over and breaking everything in our path.

Even now that we are set upon the way of salvation, we are still so blind that we are prone to wander off in the wrong direction. Temptations to sin try to lure us away from God. False beliefs can creep in, blurring our faith. In blindness, many place their trust in man-made ideas, human philosophies, or self-righteous touting of the many years of our own experience. We place our few decades of life against the Word of God; what is our lifetime vs. God, who is “*the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.*”³?

Some don't get trapped in the realm of the mind, and are rather tempted to place their faith in the emotions of the heart. Some trust their feelings to prompt and guide; which can go well, or can lead away from the path laid before us by Christ. Manmade feelings and thoughts can even deceive us into false belief; we convince ourselves that we are walking the right path, doing better than we ever have before, because we short-change the Gospel and try to stuff God into my own tiny box, just where I want Him so He can't tell me I'm doing anything wrong.

My faith is then placed in my own version of God; not in the One who must suffer and die for me. In this way, we are like the disciples, and God's truth is hidden. We walk in blindness; rather, than like the blind man who cries out to the One in whom faith truly finds rest.

Thanks be to God you are not on your own. In His grace, you have the Holy Spirit. He keeps you going in the right direction. He calls by the Gospel. He brings to your remembrance—true faith has no rest apart from Christ.

³ Revelation 22:13

Jesus is the Lord of the Sabbath. He is the God of rest. His death was for your rest. You don't have to earn your forgiveness.

You are saved from the wrath of God against sin, because Jesus has taken it for you on the cross, ***“by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”***⁴

In the Holy Christian Church, the Holy Spirit, calls, gathers, enlightens, sanctifies, and keeps. The work of salvation was finished on the cross, and through God's Word and Holy Sacraments, you are given the fruits of His cross. You are given Christ's good works. You, as the body of Christ, walk His new life given in Baptism, hearing the voice of the Good Shepherd, and feeding on the food that gives eternal life.

Through these works of God, He guards and protects you in the one true faith. Through Word and Sacrament, He feeds your faith to keep you strong, even in trials and difficulties. As you stumble about, He guides you and leads you by the hand. He will not abandon you.

Because of the Holy Spirit, our faith clings to Christ in spite of all circumstances that may try our faith. Sometimes we are like a blind man who hears noises and does not know what they mean. There are things out there that frighten us, many of which are invisible enemies of God and man. What is visible is bad enough: terrors on every side, attacks upon body and mind. The culture sometimes threatens us, and sometimes entices us to join them in their sinful lifestyles.

On top of all this, there are everyday dangers that are constantly around us. Then again, we sometimes invent our own dangers from the fears in our heads. Our emotions sometimes run wild in us.

⁴ Ephesians 2:8-10

Through all these things, the Holy Spirit has promised to keep you in the faith. When your heart would fail, He upholds it. When your fears attack, He brings you to Jesus who speaks like He did to the wind and waves, “Shh. That’s enough,” or like He did to the disciples in their anxiety, “Peace, to you.”

Sometimes, the circumstances that oppose us come from brothers and sisters in the faith. We must sometimes, like the blind man in the Gospel, endure opposition from the crowd that follows Christ. The blind man cries, as we do, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” The crowd warned him to be quiet. The crowd seems to feel that we should not let someone crying for mercy interrupt the Lord.

Except, the Lord’s ears are always listening to hear cries for mercy. He loves their sound, because it is the sound of faith speaking out loud. Sometimes, we who have faith forget that, and we take on the role of asking others to be quiet. We may speak discouraging words that deflate the spirits of fellow saints. We may look in contempt upon the actions of those whom we perceive as weaker brothers. Perhaps out of a completely innocent desire to make things better in the church, we may be the source of discouragement for others. If one is to hear God’s Word, even the Law, it is out of love. We must not speak ourselves, but Christ. His Word discourages us in our sin, so that we repent and then receive the Gospel.

Even more importantly, we blind men should not let others shush us when we cry to the Lord. We should not let others discourage us from the heartfelt cries of faith that well up from our souls. We are weak creatures, unable to see or stand on our own. We need the mercy of Jesus constantly. The Spirit-given faith that fills us cannot be quiet. Like the blind man in the Holy Gospel, we must continue begging for our Lord’s mercy, no matter how many people tell us to stop.

This is the pattern in the Church. We sing the Kyrie, “Lord, have mercy upon us,” because we must. We blind beggars have no choice. We could pretend to be self-sufficient, sighted men who can get along just fine without a Savior; this is not how faith thinks. So, the Spirit drives us instead to beg.

If we become too prideful, we may decide we do not need to beg. We may get sick of approaching Him from a position of weakness, and approach Him from a position of entitlement.

In this way, we are blind to our position of creature and thrust ourselves as creator. It is precisely here where true eyes of faith are needed. Help us to do this dear Father in heaven.

Faith looks past what our eyes see: hardships, opposition, pain, sorrow, even death and the devil. Faith can see, even in these, especially in these, Christ, our dear Savior. If we look at the troubles of the world that try to lead us away from God with earthly eyes, we may conclude that God does not love us, or else He would not let such troubles come. If we look at them with the eyes of faith, we see God sends them as gifts; so we know what is in our hearts; so we see our fallen-ness, our poor, wretched, miserable state, and turn to cling to Him alone.⁵

Using earthly eyes, the blind man might have thought, “If God really cared about me, He would not have made me blind. Why should I go beg to Christ? God will never help me.” Instead the blind man’s eyes of faith trusted in the mercy of God. He knew and he saw with perfect clarity, “***he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name. And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.***”⁶ The blind man believed this, and his faith saved him.

When your flesh tries to make you look at all the troubles and dangers of life as if God did not love you, may you instead see only one thing – Christ and Him crucified. Hidden in that suffering and death, faith knows peace with God, wrath against sin satiated, and forgiveness poured out.

The eyes of faith cannot deceive. Faith sees our Savior, who purchased life everlasting for us. He rose to show us our future, so that we look forward to the resurrection life to come, instead of putting our hopes in this present world filled with decay and corruption.

Faith sees Christ’s work of Passion and Resurrection and clings to them in steadfast love. Faith holds on to the Savior, steadfastly crying out and trusting, “***If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son***

⁵ Deuteronomy 8:2

⁶ Luke 1:49-50

but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?”⁷

Brothers and sisters in Christ, by faith, behold your God upon the altar. His Son was not spared, and here you have all things. Forgiveness, eternal life and salvation are here for you, as you receive and hold them by faith. Your faith has saved you. Go in peace. Amen.

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

⁷ Romans 8:31-32

Prayer of the Church
Quinquagesima
23 February 2020

Let us pray for the whole Church of God in Christ Jesus and for all people according to their needs.

Remember, Lord, Your promise to be a rock of refuge for Your baptized children. Be gracious to us. Create in us humble and contrite hearts, that we might always cry out to You for mercy. Fill us with Your love, and grant us grace to follow Christ, our Savior, with joy. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Remember, Lord, Matthew, our Synod president; Brian, our district president; Sam, our circuit visitor; and all pastors in Christ. Make Your face shine on them so that, through their faithful service, the eyes of those blind to Your mercies may be opened and see the salvation they have in Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Remember, Lord, our nation and its leaders. Guide them in the direction You would have them go, that peace and prosperity, truth and justice, religion and piety may dwell in our land. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Heavenly Father, our times are in Your hands. Look with favor, we pray, on Your servant *Dylan* whom You have granted another year of earthly life. Grant that *he* may grow in wisdom and grace, and strengthen *his* trust in Your goodness all the days of *his* life; Lord in Your mercy; **hear our prayer.**

Remember, Lord, the widows and orphans, the lonely and downtrodden, the poor and destitute, and our brothers and sisters in Christ who are shut in and unable to attend the Divine Service with us. Be a mighty fortress for them, surrounding them with Your compassion and care. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Remember, Lord, those who are sick, hospitalized, in treatment, undergoing surgery or recovering, and all who are in need [*especially Zoey, Jim, Pastor Olgivie, and those we name in our hearts*]. Comfort them with Your presence, sustain their faith through Your gracious promises, and bring healing to them as You will and know to be best. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Remember, Lord, those who come to the holy altar this day to receive the medicine of immortality in the Holy Eucharist. Fill all who partake of Your Son's very body and blood with His life and love, that they may depart in His peace, which surpasses all understanding. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Remember, Lord, Your promise to fill the wedding banquet of Your Son and His Bride, the Church, with guests clad in white robes. For those who have gone before us and now rest from their labors, we give You thanks and praise. Bring us, with them, to the day of our Lord's glorious return, that we may all receive the eternal inheritance You have prepared for us. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Into Your hands, O Lord, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in Your mercy; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord. **Amen.**