

Sermon Quinquagesima 2020-

February 23, 2020

Luke 18:31-43

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. This morning we meditate upon the Gospel Lesson, the healing of the blind man.

When I was in college, I was an RA for the dorms, and I remember one evening there was a program being hosted by the center for campus ministry at Indiana. Now, when I say campus ministry, I speak of the actual center run by the university for campus ministry. This was Indiana University's representation of the Christian Faith to its students. Now as I say that, don't get me wrong, I can appreciate the challenge that such a position presents in view of the establishment clause—although I think that's often misinterpreted in our day to mean that there is no place for the faith in the public square, which isn't what it means, but I digress. Even with this sympathy, this presentation upset me. Why? Because as a Christian I had the expectation that the University ought convey the faith of the Bible to its students properly. Instead what I found was something different. In this particular presentation, we all were asked to make a list of three ways we would identify ourselves. The representative from the campus ministry did so with identifying herself as a woman first, and if I recall correctly, then heterosexual, then last as a Christian. Now, to put the best construction on this perhaps she was trying to be as delicate as possible to have an opportunity to talk with those not of the faith and maintain an open line of communication. That's certainly possible, but to me it was greatly disappointing. Why, as a Christian, she should be identifying herself first and foremost as such.

As I say that, such a focus on these identities as a whole is something we see a lot in our day, isn't it? I've mentioned this before, but it seems that everything comes down to how we identify. It comes down to our sex, or gender, or however we choose to describe it. It comes down to our race, to our sexuality, again however we choose to describe those. And as I say that, those two categories tend to be the focus, and then perhaps we speak of an identity relating to our creed. Now, don't get me wrong, in our nation, we have a melting pot of cultures and races and creeds, and there is a blessing in this. For us as Christians, even an opportunity to share the Gospel with those who don't believe. But unfortunately this has resulted in a catastrophic division.

In fact, I was reading an article recently that said it wisely. In implicit view of these divisions by race and gender, the article made the point that in our day anger has

become a virtue. Isn't that a way to say it? In our day we are angry about everything. If someone has a point of view we disagree with, we are angry. If someone does something we don't like, we're angry. If someone slights a cause we support, we are angry.

Now don't get me wrong, there are certainly things worth getting angry about. Our Lord even shows that with his anger at the temple, His anger at treating the Lord's house as a place for business, and even more so for stealing from those who don't necessarily have much means. But we should be guarded about that.

Now as I say all of this, you might be asking to what end. What's the point? What's the point especially in conjunction with our lesson this morning? Well you see, I think this anger, and I think this representative of Christianity seeming to be only tentatively willing to describe herself as Christian demonstrates something. It demonstrates a misplaced faith. If we are angry because someone has slighted something we identify with, where is our faith? In that identity. If we as Christians identify ourselves more so by our race, our gender, our sexuality, where is our faith? In short, not in our Lord, right?

And so we have this lesson this morning about faith. Here is Jesus, He's on His way to Jerusalem to die, and what happens? There's this blind man who comes and calls out to Him—and we're going to come back to this man in a minute—but as Jesus heals him, what does Jesus say? **“Recover your sight; your faith has made you well.”** **“Your faith has made you well.”** Or the Greek could even say more literally, “Your faith has saved you.” What does that mean? In particular, we could ask “what is faith?”

Simply put, I always refer to the Lutheran definition which is to say that faith is a trust. To add a bit more we could take the step that Luther does with the First Commandment. What's the First Commandment? You shall have no other gods. What does this mean? We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things. Now that was from the Small Catechism. In his Large Catechism, Luther makes this point about the First Commandment, he says, *“The purpose of this commandment, therefore, is to require true faith and confidence of the heart, and these fly straight to the one true God and cling to him alone.”* In other words, as we seek to understand faith we look to the call of the First Commandment: having no other gods. And we can understand that commandment to mean that we should fear, love, and trust in God above all things.

So to examine our faith, we should ask what we fear more than God. So what do you fear more than God? Do you fear what people say and their opinions? Do you fear bodily harm more than God? And what do you love or trust more than God? Do love

the pleasures of this life more than His Commands? Or your family, do you love your family more than God? Do you trust in the comforts and securities of this life more than His promises? Whatever you fear, love, or trust more than Him then becomes your god for that time. So in this call to faith He says to you: look to me. Trust me. Trust that I want your good. Trust that I love you and am worthy of your love more than anything or anyone else in the world.

Or as we think of it this way, let's break this down in view of the particularities from the lesson this morning. As we see this lesson, here is a blind man whose sight is restored. And I always think of what a great image this for faith. It's like we say in Amazing Grace, "I once was lost, but now am found, was blind, but now I see." I remember years ago talking about darkness and light and making the point about how we grope around in the darkness of sin stumbling. As I made that point I said that it's akin to that inimitable feeling of being in the darkness of my kids' room and stepping barefoot on a Lego. In the blindness of unbelief, we run into these things and we don't know what to think of them, maybe even what they are, but just that they hurt.

But then Jesus gives us sight to see that these pains come as a consequence of the Fall into sin. He shows us that these things all the more joyfully are overcome by Him. Just like the blind man could see the light of day, we can too.

Of course, ironically this blind man already had the sight of faith didn't he? Even before his physical sight was restored by Jesus, he had the faith in this Jesus. And in that faith, what does he do? Listen: **He cried out, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" And those who were in front rebuked him, telling him to be silent. But he cried out all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!"**

What does this blind man do? He cries out to Jesus! In fact, they try to get him to stop and he cries out "all the more!" Christians, what an example for us. When things seem to cover over the sight of God's goodness, when they seem to try to hush us, cry out all the more! When it seems like the devil, the world and your sinful nature want to silence you, cry out all the more! When it feels as though there's no answer, cry out all the more!

To tie this to the Catechism again, I love how Luther puts this in the Lord's Prayer. Here you have Jesus giving these beautiful words, teaching His disciples and us to pray, and what does Luther say about it? *"With these words, [Our Father, that is,] God tenderly invites us to believe that He is our True Father, and we are His true children, so that with all boldness and confidence we may ask Him as dear children ask their Dear*

Father.” Faith trusts this Jesus, trusts that He will hear us because He says so, and trusts that He will have mercy on us.

That’s something I love in this story, here is this man begging, and he asks Jesus for mercy. Now, something interesting is that the word there could just be alms. The understanding was that almsgiving was grounded in one desiring to be merciful, so the root of the word is the same. So he could be asking for some kind of aid. But no matter his intent, he’s asking for aid of any kind. He’s crying out to this one, fearing, loving, and trusting Him no matter what He might give. And He gives.

And you see, that’s the root of faith ultimately for us. He does give. As He said to His disciples, **“See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished. For he will be delivered over to the Gentiles and will be mocked and shamefully treated and spit upon. And after flogging him, they will kill him, and on the third day he will rise.”** Of course, the disciples didn’t get it, but what joy that we have in the resurrection: we see what this is. We see that this Jesus is so merciful to us that He holds nothing back. He gives over even His whole life for us. He has given that life for you. For your sin, that you can trust that God isn’t angry with you, isn’t angry with your sin anymore. He has shed His blood for you, given that blood that cries out for you.

If you remember the story of Cain and Abel, you might remember that when the Lord comes to Cain, He tells Cain that Abel’s blood cried out from the ground. The writer to the Hebrews says that Christ’s blood cries out with a better Word than that of Abel’s. Do you see it? As you cry out to Him, His blood cries out in mercy for you before our Heavenly Father. It cries out that the Father would bless you, would keep you, would preserve you in every circumstance. And all of this is because Jesus is the One who gives.

And He still gives to you today in baptism, in His Word, in His body and blood. And why? So that in these you would hear, you would know that you can trust Him. He gives you His gifts that you would know and trust Him. And as you know and trust Him in that faith, He makes you His own. To tie back to the beginning then, as we live in this world with our identities and anger, then you can see with the insight of faith in Christ. That is your identity. That is who you are. You are His, you are His beloved. And He is trustworthy and good. He is worthy for you to call up in every trial because He will give you His mercy, His aid, again and again. In fact He already has by faith. Amen.