

Quinquagesima
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+ Jesu juva +

OPENING THE BLIND EYES

Luke 18:31-43; I Corinthians 13:1-13; Isaiah 35:3-7

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

ehold, we are going up to Jerusalem..." They had been there before, of course, to the great city of David, to the place where the Temple was, to the heart of the Judea. But what the purpose for which they were going was not according to their liking. "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. And they will scourge Him and put Him to death. And the third day He will rise again." And St. Luke tells us that these words, though clearly heard by their ears, were hidden from them in some way, so that they did not know or understand the things that Jesus was saying.

Why were these things hidden? Why did they not know this saying? Because they were not willing to hear such things. It made no sense to them that Jesus would travel to Jerusalem in order to suffer. Their minds are closed to this. And later when Jesus again says such things to them, Peter the chief disciple rejects His Lord's Words. Matthew tells us (16:21-22): "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. Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, "Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!" Clearly this was not what the disciples expected would happen to Jesus. It was not what they wanted. And, so whether it was they themselves that shut the words out, or God that hid them in some way so that they would not interfere with Jesus' going up to the city or His coming Passion, they are blinded to what Jesus is saying.

Of course what Jesus was telling them should have been known to them, at least in part; for throughout the Scriptures of the Old Testament it is shown that the Messiah will suffer as He performs His saving work. It was prophesied in Genesis that the Savior would crush Satan's head, but in the process would Himself be bruised. It was shown figuratively in the Exodus by the killing of the spotless lamb, and again by the Rock being struck to provide water for the people, which Rock, St. Paul tells us, was Christ. It was prophesied by David and the Psalmists, by Isaiah and by Zechariah, by Solomon, etc., etc. Salvation, it is clear, from the entire Old Testament, comes at a cost, the suffering of the One sent by God to accomplish it. And here we see again the blindness of the disciples who could not, or would not, see this.

Now as they make their way on this journey toward Jerusalem, they come to the city of Jericho and encounter a man begging by the side of the road who is blind. Though He is blind, He clearly knows who Jesus is. Though He cannot see the Words of the Scriptures, He believes that this Man passing by him is the promised Savior. And so he cries out to Him: “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” and will not quit crying out with the same words even though people are getting upset with him. This man could not see Jesus with His eyes, but He perceived Him by faith. He not only knows Jesus’ name, but calls Him by His kingly and messianic title “Son of David”. And He asks for the very thing Jesus was going to Jerusalem to gain for mankind. He asks Jesus for mercy.

And when Jesus stops and asks him what he wants, He replies: “Lord, that I may receive my sight.” And why do you suppose He thinks Jesus will do such a thing for him? Because the prophets have foretold this very miracle. After all, did we not hear this morning that the Messiah would do this? “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...”



Ironic isn't it? This man who sees so clearly by faith asks to have sight; while his disciples who have their eyesight already, are blind in spirit to Jesus' purpose and do not seek enlightenment. He knows what Jesus is about, the gaining and giving of mercy; and they who follow Him, refuse to listen to Jesus words about the Passion by which that great mercy will come.

And it is a further irony that this blind man who has such great faith fades quickly from the story, but the disciples who could not see, are the ones sent out to open the eyes of the world. Of course their own eyes had to be opened first! But that would not happen until Jesus had accomplished all that the prophets had said would happen to him.

And so He did go up to Jerusalem, was betrayed by His own people, was handed over to the Romans, was mocked, beaten, and spat upon, and was hung up on the cross to die. And all of this He underwent willingly to procure the mercy of God the Father for us. But the story did not end there, else the disciples would never had seen the truth. He also rose again, victorious over betrayers, over persecutors, over cross, over grave, over Satan, over sin, over shame, over sorrow, over mourning, over blindness and deafness and lameness and dumbness, and over thirst and hunger and every aspect of sin's curse. And only then, after presenting Himself alive and victorious and showing them ample proof of the reality of His resurrection and victory were their eyes at last open so that they could see. And seeing, they were sent out that we might also be given sight through the Word they preached.

And what of you? What are you looking for? What do you want Jesus to do for you? Here are great many Christians stumble about it blindness, not knowing, or perhaps in some way choosing not to know, the great mercy Jesus gives. They look to Him for other things. And so what do you seek? Do you seek only temporal blessings from Jesus? Is the mercy you seek the mere mercy of a happy life on this earth? Do you seek only for Jesus to remove the troubles and sorrows of your life now? Do you seek from Him an easy path and worldly security? Do you look to Jesus only for today's wants? Jesus speaks to this: "For after all these things the Gentiles seek."

So perhaps you seek something nobler from Jesus. What many now seek from Jesus is that He liberate the poor and provide equality for all people, that poverty and homelessness and suffering of any sort be eradicated, that warfare be ended, that peace be pursued among all, that respect be had for all people and cultures, and yes even for their different religions. In the mail this weekend we received a newsletter from another church in the area and I couldn't help but notice their mission statement, in other words, what they think Jesus and His mercy is all about: "We seek to be an inclusive Christian community that affirms faith in God and spiritual growth with a commitment to justice and stewardship of God's creation." Is that what we are to look for from Jesus? Inclusivity? Worldly justice? A greener planet? As noble as these things may sound, this is just another form of blindness.

Now we must seek what God the Father sent Jesus to give us. And that is something far greater than happiness and satisfaction in this life, greater than social justice, greater than greening of our environment. Here we must listen to St. Paul and distinguish between child-like thinking and adult thinking. For while such gifts may be good to a certain degree, they are not the best things, nor are they the things Christ calls us to seek.

Let us, in repentance, put away this blindness, then, and with eyes that have been opened, seek that Christ would ever increase our sight, that is, that He would increase our faith by giving us the clear vision of His Passion and of His precious gifts for us. Yes, in the words of today's Introit Psalm, let us pray: "Have mercy on me, O Lord... my eye wastes away with grief. Make Your face shine upon Your servant; save me for your mercies' sake."

Yes, seeking Christ's mercy, we are to seek the things that really matter. And what are these? St. Paul identifies them for us: faith, hope and love. First faith, that by the grace and mercy of Christ we put our trust fully in Him, in His saving work, and in His Holy Word. By faith we, like the blind man, apprehend and comprehend Christ's blessings and mercy. And without faith, we have nothing. Second, hope, which flows from faith. This hope is the hope of salvation and everlasting life which Christ has won for us, it is not something fulfilled in this life, but only in the life to come where Christ's victory will at last be enjoyed by us in its fullness, and where there will be a complete renewing of all things! And

finally love, love that flows from Christ to us first, and then because we have been so loved, from us to others.

These are the benefits of His having gone up to Jerusalem to save us. These are the results of His forgiveness of our sins, and of His gift of grace and life to us, won by His passion, death and resurrection. And these precious and lasting gifts are yours by the mercy of Christ Jesus, who has opened our blind eyes that we may see, and to whom belongs all glory and honor, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen.

+ Soli Deo gloria +