

Quinquagesima
19 February, Anno Domini 2023
St. Luke 18:31-43

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ,

Beloved of God,

It might come as a shock to know that not only in our time but from the very beginning men have found it nearly impossible to understand Jesus, to see Him for who He really is. The disciples simply couldn't figure out what Jesus meant by all this betrayal and dying nonsense. "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God. You can't be serious. Yeah, there are some folks who don't like you, but that's just because they haven't gotten a chance to know you." The disciples, of all people, should have understood why Jesus came. They had been with Jesus for three years and seen first-hand the healings and the miracles. They had sat at Jesus' feet and heard the teaching. They had seen Jesus have mercy upon hundreds if not thousands of people. But they still didn't fully grasp the extent of Jesus' mercy and compassion for sinners. They couldn't understand why Jesus had set His face toward Jerusalem to suffer the awful things He spoke of.

It wasn't that they were backwards fisherman who didn't know any better. The problem was that they were still wise in their own eyes. They had their own ideas about Jesus. They didn't understand because they weren't ready to be beggars. They weren't ready for the mocking, the spitting, the flogging, or the killing. They weren't ready to admit that it was their own sins that demanded the Son of God die. There was still pride that had to be torn down. There were still delusions of self-righteousness that needed to be ripped away. The Law and the Prophets were good stories mixed in with some wise advice. If you aren't prepared to beg, then you aren't prepared to receive Jesus.

But the blind man was prepared. In this poor beggar at Jericho's gate there was no room for pride. He may not have read Scripture, but he soaked it in through his ears. He lived St. Paul's later words "Faith comes by hearing." (Rom. 10:17) The Law weighed heavily upon him and exposed the inescapable truth of who he was. He heard the call to repentance. He knew that he was a sinner and nothing he said or did could change that. There was no use in pretending otherwise. He knew that he didn't deserve anything from God. He knew that he had no business asking God for anything. But in those same Scriptures, the blind man also heard the voices of the prophets pointing to Jesus of Nazareth. He heard Moses, Samuel, David, Isaiah and Jeremiah lifting up their voices to proclaim the one who would come and have mercy on sinners. That's why no one could silence him. He knew this Jesus would show him mercy. The blind man wasn't interested in fairness. He didn't cry out for justice as we might expect. Those wouldn't have really gotten him anywhere. But to receive mercy from the promised Messiah – that

meant eternal life, forgiveness, redemption from sin and death. For that he was prepared to beg, to cry out no matter who heard him or how uncomfortable it made those still caught up in their self-righteousness. And so he cried out over the noise of the crowd, making sure that his prayer for mercy reached the ears of Jesus.

That is the true cry of faith “Have mercy on me!” And it cannot be silenced because it is a cry of desperation. It is the cry of the one who sees clearly that there is simply no other way out of the terror and misery of sin. What the rest of the world thinks doesn’t matter. They will call you foolish. They may rebuke you for trying to distract the Lord with your petty problems when there are real evils like hunger, injustice, intolerance, and gun violence. But the beggar of faith knows better and will not stop seeking God’s mercy until he finds it. He feels the weight of his sin hanging around his neck like a millstone. The beggar cries out for what he knows he doesn’t deserve. And faith knows that in order to receive that mercy, all the prophecies must be fulfilled – especially the ones about rejection and stripes because through them comes the fulfillment of the prophecies of peace and healing.

And that is exactly what the Lord Jesus has come to give all who cry out for it, all who seek it – mercy. That is why He made His way to Jerusalem and no one could turn Him aside. He was on a mission – a mission to take all your unclean, unholy, prideful, vengeful thoughts, words, and deeds to Calvary’s cross and put them to death; a mission to use His clean, holy, selfless flesh to shield you from God’s wrath against your sin. So of course Jesus stopped to help the blind man. It is what He does. He has come to have mercy on all who call upon Him in their need, who call upon Him as poor beggars. He has come to have mercy on you because He knows what you suffer and it has moved Him to compassion.

The blind man received his sight. His eyes were opened and he saw Jesus. And he rejoiced. He rejoiced that God is merciful to unworthy sinners. And He followed Jesus. He followed His Lord right to Jerusalem and rejoiced in the betrayal, the mocking, the spitting, the piercing, and the dying. He glorified God for the rising. He glorified God because He fulfilled His promise by giving His own life as a ransom for us.

Now it is time for us to turn our faces to Jerusalem. In three days we will receive the ashes of repentance upon our foreheads, reminding us of what we often forget - that we too are beggars, desperate for the mercy of our Lord. We should be readying ourselves for the time of fasting and examination ahead, considering our lives in light of the Ten Commandments, going to individual confession to hear Christ’s absolution. We will follow our Lord to the cross and the tomb. But we won’t stop there. That isn’t our final destination. Golgotha is the means by which we are brought to the resurrection of Easter and the new Jerusalem where there will be no more suffering and no more blindness of any kind. There we will fully know our Lord even as we are now fully known by Him. We will live and bask there in His glorious presence as His dear children.

Let us learn to be like the blind man. Let us set aside our pride and become beggars. No more excuses. No more pretending. No more false shows of piety or strength and impossible promises of reform. May we all use this Lent properly, as a time of holy preparation, a time of cleansing and renewal of mind, body, and soul through confession and Holy Absolution. Let us be mindful that we aren't preparing for Jesus' death and resurrection but for His final and glorious return. Let us not come as though we are somehow entitled or as someone who has been wronged. Let us come as poor, miserable beggars – completely undeserving. Let us admit, confess, and tell the truth rather than in any way try to deceive ourselves.

Let us beg for the Lord's mercy and not be silenced by devilish worries of rebuke or doubt because the Lord will always give His mercy to those who seek it.

In the Name of +Jesus.

Pastor Ulmer

(We stand.) The peace of God which passes all human understanding keeps your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus.