

Many members. One body united in Christ.

Quinquagesima

St. Luke 18:31-43

15 February, Anno Domini 2026

Beloved in Lord,

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

The distinction before us today between the blind disciples and seeing Bartimaeus is profoundly important for us to consider as we once again begin the descent into the darkness of Lent this Wednesday.

The disciples had all the information they needed. Jesus told them explicitly what was about to happen. “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.” It doesn’t seem like there is much left that required understanding. Of course, it wasn’t that the disciples didn’t know what flogging or crucifixion were. Let’s not insult their intelligence. What they didn’t understand is why these things were going to happen. They didn’t yet understand what it meant that Jesus was the Messiah. Peter made that very clear when he tried to actively prevent Jesus from going to the cross. But that was met with a very swift and damning rebuke from Jesus “Get behind me, Satan!” The death of the God-Man is the work of the Messiah through which alone everything He preached and did can and must be understood. When did Peter finally begin to understand? When the crow of the rooster split the cold night air, announcing Peter’s condemnation for his three-fold denial of Jesus whom he had promised only hours before that he himself would die defending rather than scattering in fear. Peter’s boldness and confidence were crushed to ground as his eyes met the bruised and swollen eyes of Jesus. The terror of eternal hell swept over Peter like a flood and his eyes filled with the most bitter tears of grief and sorrow and shame. Peter knew that he deserved every ounce of God’s wrath for his betrayal and cowardice. All the more so because of his fervent vow that he would never do such a thing even if it cost him his life. Peter knew that he should suffer the death of eternal

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judgment with the devil and his angels. Can we claim innocence? Can we look down our noses at Peter? Have we who made vows at our confirmation to be faithful to God and His Word even unto death, kept those vows inviolate at all times? Don't we have plenty of reasons to weep those same bitter tears of sorrow and shame. Have we not pretended not to be one of Jesus' disciples and sought to avoid the mockery or ire of friends, colleagues, classmates, or family? Have we not denied our Lord before the world and our Christian family by allowing anything other than absolute necessity to keep us from the Lord's house when He calls to gather us to speak with us and feed us? Yes, Peter, we share your shame and your tears.

But that dark hour is precisely when Peter began to understand what Jesus meant when He said "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." He began to understand why it was demonic to try to keep Jesus from the cross. If it wasn't Jesus on the cross being utterly forsaken by God, then it was going to be Peter. That death that Peter deserved, that death that you and I deserve for our denial of Jesus by our loveless words and deeds, that is the death that Jesus was sent by the Father to die. That IS the work of the Christ. He was born and anointed to die for the sins of the whole world. The dread that fell upon Peter opened his eyes to see that the mercy and forgiveness of God which he desperately needed was exactly why they went up to Jerusalem, why Jesus allowed Himself to be arrested in the garden, why Jesus refused to open His mouth, and why Jesus allowed the nails to be pounded through His hands and feet.

Blind Peter could now see because he had been brought see his need for God's mercy. That's what poor and blind Bartimaeus saw outside Jericho. He didn't need eyes. His ears saw Jesus just fine. All that Bartimaeus had heard about Jesus' teaching and miracles revealed to him for certain that this Jesus of Nazareth was the promised Son of David who had come to give sight to the blind and preach good news to the poor. Mercy was Bartimaeus' life-blood. Nothing he had came from his own hard work. Without mercy, Bartimaeus had no hope. The report of Jesus created in faith in the blind man because the report painted the clear picture that Jesus of Nazareth was the mercy of God in the flesh come to have mercy on sinners like him and to help him in his

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need.

How easy it is to become like the disciples and become blind to Jesus even though He is right here in our midst. We think that simply having the facts straight will save us, as though entrance into eternal life will be based on a true/false test.

It is so easy to become like the crowds who grow annoyed at the afflictions and sufferings and needs of others and rebuke them for crying out for mercy, telling them to stop bothering us and Jesus with their problems because we have more important things to attend to. That is not faith. That is deep and utter blindness fueled by a denial or willful ignorance of our own need for God's mercy. And if we don't think that we are in danger of this blindness, then we are blind already. Consider how easily we don't pray or read the Bible; how nonchalantly we watch and listen to things that praise evil; how easily we excuse ourselves from Holy Communion or confession or Sunday School or family devotions. Consider how many of your brothers and sisters in Christ are no longer among us because they have been drawn away by the world.

As Paul warned the Corinthian Christians, we can have all kinds of knowledge and spiritual gifts, but if those aren't used in love to draw us to Christ and to build up and benefit our neighbor, they are worthless. Indeed, they condemn us. They become our false Christ. And lest we be confused about what love is and substitute our own self-serving version, Paul makes it explicit. "Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends." Who among us can claim that those words describe us? None. Not a single one of us. If we would have eyes to see and not be blind like the apostles, then we will readily acknowledge that there is a lot of lovelessness in these wicked hearts. We will not excuse the evil but confess it and take up arms against it no matter how much our flesh kicks and screams and resists. And how much worse is it to behold such things in ourselves when we have drunk deeply of the cup of God's love, filled with the Blood which Jesus shed for us in love? "Why don't I love to read the Bible and pray more? Why do I have such a hard time forgiving and being reconciled to my brothers and sisters who have sinned against me? Why am I not glad when they say to me 'Let us go up to the house of the Lord?' Why am I hesitant to tithe? Why do I fear death?"

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Only a heart that is distressed by what it sees in itself is a good and honest heart. That heart will cry out “Jesus, have mercy on me!” That is the heart that doesn’t try to look past the scourges and the nails of Good Friday but stares intently at them and won’t look away because those are the stripes by which you are healed. Those nails are holding up the most beautiful and comforting thing you can imagine - your Lord and your God whose perfect love for you brought Him from His heavenly throne to fill your flesh with His life by suffering the wretchedness of your death under His own righteous wrath. What could possibly be more beautiful than that?

Those who do not know their need and seek mercy from God will forever not understand what Jesus says or does. Such people will look away from the cross and Good Friday will not find them in the Father’s house, receiving the Food of His table which He prepared for you by slaughtering His own precious Son on the cross to atone for your sin. Such turn up their noses and roll their eyes at the prospect of disciplining their sinful flesh through things like fasting, going to confession, or turning off the television so that you can pick up your Bible instead.

Dear brothers and sisters, God grant that such blindness not be found among us. We who have been baptized in the Triune Name - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit - have been given eyes to see. And though what we see in ourselves with those eyes we loathe as the Old Adam continues to fight against the new man whom God has created in the image of Christ, with those same eyes we see Jesus who bore our sins in His sinless flesh and made full satisfaction for them. We see Jesus who has given us His Holy Spirit who dwells within us and fights against the sin that remains. And no matter who would try to shame us for our zealotry we will continue to boldly cry out day after day “Jesus, have mercy on us!”, confident that He will hear us and deliver us and give us strength to endure. He will not pass us by or leave us without His help. Indeed, this very day, He has stopped in our midst to give to us the mercy for which we pray by giving us as food and drink the very Body and Blood which were offered in payment for our sin. These assure us of the Father’s love and the perfect healing of both body and soul which will be ours the day that Jesus comes again on the clouds to gather together His saints and put away from us forever, the sin and death that now trouble us. Until that day, let our cries ascend all the louder with our brother Bartimaeus “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on us!” Because it is to sinners like us that

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Jesus of Nazareth stops and says “Take heart; your faith has saved you.”

To Him be glory now and forever.

In the Name of +Jesus.

Pastor Ulmer

(We stand.) The peace of God which passes all human understanding keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus our Lord.