

Quinquagesima Sunday February 7, 2016
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Trinity Lutheran Church
Luke 18:31-43
What God Sees Is Not What We See

One bright day in the middle of the night

Two dead boys got up to fight.

Back to back they faced each other

With their swords they shot each other.

A deaf policeman heard the noise

And came and shot the two dead boys.

And if you don't believe me, ask the blind man. He saw it too.

My father used to tell us kids this silly tale. The ridiculous contradictions always made us laugh. Night is not day. The deaf don't hear, and the blind don't see. Yet in our Gospel lesson today, we mark such a contradiction. Although the disciples hear perfectly and nothing blocks their vision, they are blind to understand Jesus' message. Yet a blind man sees clearly, who Jesus is.

Jesus doesn't use big words. He isn't speaking in a riddle. He plainly states, "See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything written about the Son of Man through 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." There's nothing complicated about this message. Yet, the disciples respond as if they heard a rhyme about bright days in the middle of the night. There was nothing wrong with their ears. There was nothing incoherent about Jesus words. Yet, the disciples could not understand.

Jesus' words were impossible for the disciples to understand because they couldn't *accept* the truth. Their human reason would not let them believe that their master, who heals the sick and raises the dead, would be shamed and killed by uncircumcised pagans. It didn't matter that this was the *third* time Jesus foretold his death. It didn't matter that the prophets clearly foretold that the Christ must suffer. From God's declaration to Satan that the Christ would crush his head, but he would bruise his heel in Genesis 3:15, to David's prophecy in his lamentation of Psalm 22, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" and "All who see me mock me" and "I am poured out like water and all my bones are out of joint, my heart is like wax; it is melted within my breast; my strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to my jaws; you lay me in the dust of death" to Isaiah's prophecy, "Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed" (Is. 53:4-5) the prophets have proclaimed in Holy Scripture that the Christ must suffer death for our sins.

The disciples were so distraught that Jesus predicted his death, they didn't recognize that he predicted his own resurrection as well! Of course the prophets of the Old Testament spoke of this as well, from Abraham receiving back his son on Mount Mariah, to Jonah's three day stint in the stomach of the fish, to Job's confession that he knows his Redeemer lives. Christ's death and resurrection were predicted. And Jesus taught it. But his disciples did not understand. They let their reason block out the truth.

This is often our problem, isn't it. You've heard it. We walk by faith, not by sight. This is true! Yet how often do we let our eyes block our vision! Or worse, we let our

minds confuse our understanding. Do you believe God's Word? Do you believe that God declared you his child in your Baptism? Do you believe that the words of forgiveness spoken from your pastor come from God himself? Do you trust that Christ's body and blood truly forgive your sins and strengthen your faith in the Lord's Supper? You can only believe these things through faith. Your eyes won't convince you. Your mind will try to dissuade you. But God chooses to use what our minds find foolish to fool the wise and give eternal life to those who believe.

While the disciples remained blind as bats, the blind man's saw like an eagle as he recognized his Savior. This second section of our text teaches us that sight must submit to faith. The man couldn't see. Yet, he recognized Jesus as the Christ. He heard the Gospel and believed it. And because he had faith, he cried out with boldness. When people around him reprimanded him and told him to shut-up, he kept praying to his Lord. He asked for his sight and Jesus restored it to him. He sought and he found. He knocked and the door was opened. He asked and it was given to him. That is what faith does, despite blindness, despite ridicule and prohibition. Faith seeks Christ.

The blind beggar teaches us a lot about faith and prayer. Faith requires you to submit to God's Word. If you deny the truth of God's Word, then your faith is no longer based on God's promises, but on your own thoughts and desires. The trend to treat the Bible like any other book has led many so called theologians to deny the faith. They put God's Word to the test and God's Word fails their exam miserably. The Bible doesn't fit their criteria, so they dismiss it as myths and legends, and the opinions of flawed men. So they deny that God created the world the way he said he did. They deny that human beings are all sinful as a result of the fall into sin. They deny that Jesus is God. They deny

that he rose from the dead. So it is common practice now to critique God's Word, put it through our test, and accept only what seems reasonable to us at the time.

But that's not faith. Not only do such methods leave the sinner in despair, without a Savior, but they are deeply flawed. God's Word is truth. It cannot make mistakes. Our reason can. Our minds are sinful and limited. Our minds can cause us to persist in an argument, even when we are obviously wrong for pride's sake. Our minds will deny that we have sinned, so that we don't feel bad. Our minds will set us up above our loved ones, our neighbors, and God. But God's Word speaks truth. He tells us we're sinners; he does not lie. He won't sugar coat it. Christ will speak the truth, no matter how difficult it is for us to accept.

Not only does Jesus preach the truth regardless of his disciples' sensibilities, he lives it. While the disciples were uncomfortable with Jesus being mistreated and murdered, Jesus submitted to his Father's will as the prophets foretold. While the disciples turned their eyes away from the cross, as if their denial would make it any less true, Jesus walked to Jerusalem fully aware that he would there pick up his cross. Jesus died. This isn't a myth. It happened. Jesus said it would and it did. And just as surely as Jesus predicted it to his disciples, Christ rose from the dead on the third day. No matter that his disciples didn't believe it, Jesus did it anyway. And he did it to save you from your sins.

And just as faith must cling to God's Word and ignore the doubts of your mind, so must your prayers. The beggar teaches us to pray blinded to the world's distractions, while focused on Jesus, his power, his love, and his willingness to help. Faith clings to God's promises. Prayer confesses those promises to God, asking that he would come

through for Jesus sake. Faith causes us to pray without ceasing, boldly and confidently, because it doesn't rely on our unstable minds, but the certainty of God's Word and promise.

This Wednesday marks the beginning of Lent. We will focus on Jesus suffering and humiliation for us. Everyone who comes to church will hear the same words. You'll all hear of Christ's temptation for your sake. His mercy, his teachings, his warnings, and of course his suffering and his dying. But pray earnestly that God would open your eyes of faith, so that you will see the benefits of Christ's work for you. Pray for understanding that is not esteemed by this world, that is even unnatural to your mind, but that gives you hope in Christ's forgiveness and salvation. Pray that you not only see the mocking, spitting, flogging, and dying, but trust that such a strange sight cleanses you from your sins.

In Jesus name,

Amen.