

Luke 18.31-43
Quinquagesima
11 February 2018
St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church, Topeka, Kansas

+ INI +

Beloved in the Lord: Grace be unto you and peace from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.
Amen.

Oremus: sint placentes sermones oris mei, meditatio cordis nostri in conspectu tuo, Domine fortitudo mea et redemptor meus. Ps. 19.14 [19.15 𐀀 iuxta hebr. alt.]

The wonderful Lenten hymn “A Lamb Goes Uncomplaining Forth” has a sentence in it that has stuck with me from my youth. “All this I willing suffer.”

Spoken by the Lord Jesus in the hymn. Spoken to you and to me by the Lord Jesus for our every comfort against the mess of human life, against sin and death, against hell itself.

For what the Lord Jesus suffered at the hands of the high priest. What the Lord Jesus suffered at the hands of Herod. And at the hands of Pilate and the Roman soldiers. The shame and mockery He bore from the jeering crowds, “Crucify! Crucify!” The pagan spit running down His sacred face. His bitter, shameful death on a cross. Naked as a jailbird before His own people. The outrage done to His holy body when the soldier rammed the sharp tip a spear into His side—none of that happened by chance. None of that was just a miscarriage of justice. None of that was contrary to the will of Jesus, never mind the will of heavenly Father.

Instead, over it all Jesus speaks the words of the hymn, “All this I willing suffer.”

That’s exactly what the first part of the Gospel for today teaches; and this is a good teaching to hear just as we enter Lent, this season that culminates in the Holy Triduum of Good Friday, the Vigil, and the Feast of the Resurrection of Our Lord. What we will behold on Good Friday is the ultimate expression of the Lord’s good and gracious will. Better yet, what we will behold on Good Friday is the Lord’s good and gracious will.

And it is this to which faith clings. It is God’s promise and will written in the blood of the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

But whoever doesn’t take measure of this can only be terrified. Terrified that if this is what must happen to the Son of God, then what of me?

Because here is One who is innocent. Here is a New Adam and a New Man who unlike the Old doesn’t know sin. Here is One who works only good, never levels a needlessly sharp word. Here is One who seeks first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and is satisfied with whatever is added unto Him.

How unlike you that is. Far from no knowledge of sin, you’re unable to help yourself. Pulled by an aching, gnawing hunger to the evil you would not, the history of your life could be written as a string of offenses against God’s holy Law. And in the wickedness of your imagination you can hardly imagine a life of pleasure without sin.

How unlike you He is. For you do not work only good. How often you're nothing but a clanging cymbal; impatience and harshness, dissatisfaction, boastfulness, and arrogance where there should be nothing but patience, kindness, contentment, and humility.

How unlike you He is.

And yet, this is what happens to Him. He is scourged, spat upon, reviled, mocked, and crucified. This is the world's harsh justice—against the only Just One.

What terrors both now and in eternity must await you?

That's what the disciples are afraid of. Because the preaching of the cross is both the highest preaching of the Gospel but also the most pointed preaching of the Law. If this is what the Son of Man must suffer, what must man suffer? If this is what the Son of Man must endure, though innocent, what must man endure in his guilt? If this is the justice leveled against the guiltless and sinless, then what terror of justice must be brought against *me*, who am nothing but a sinner?

And so they tuned it out, the 12 did.

It's right there in plain English: The Son of Man will be delivered over to the Gentiles; He'll be mocked; He'll be outraged; He'll be spat upon; He'll be spat upon; He'll get whipped; He'll get killed—not "He'll die," but "He'll be killed." Plain English. And this the third time it had been spelled out for them.

And yet, how many more ways could Luke have put their reaction to it? They understood *none* of these things. The saying was hidden from them. They did not know what was being said.

Which is to say: they did not have faith. They did not trust. They did not see in Jesus' resolve to go up to Jerusalem that it was *His* will and *His Father's* will.

That His suffering death was no miscarriage of justice, but God's greatest *act* of justice.

That the blows that landed on Him were not randomly laid upon the scapegoat of the moment, the Palestinian whipping boy who happened to be available, but came from the very eternal counsel of God Himself.

Of the God who would not have the death of the sinner.

Of the God who made His Son, who knew no sin, to be sin for us.

Of the God whose justice must be met, but whose love and mercy upon the crown of His creation draws that justice upon His Son.

Of the Son, who is one with His Father—in essence and will—and willingly suffers all this to save sinners.

That's what the 12 missed. Being told they didn't know. Having it explained they didn't understand. And though seeing, it was hidden from them.

Unlike the beggar on the side of the road. Though blind, none of this was hidden from him.

Now you've got to get the timeline here. Jesus had just passed *through* Jericho on the way to Jerusalem. He told the disciples He must suffer and die *as he was approaching Jericho* to get to Jerusalem. Then they passed through. And then heading out of Jericho to Jerusalem, they passed by Bartimaeus for the first time. And then Jesus ran into Zacchaeus. Zacchaeus repented, believed in Jesus, and invited Jesus to his house. But Zacchaeus lived back in Jericho. So Jesus turned around and headed back to town. In the meantime, Bartimaeus has heard all about Jesus. And then Jesus bursts back onto the scene.

And now Bartimaeus can't keep quiet. From the top of his lungs it's, "Jesus, Son of David! Have mercy on me!"

Now, study the contrast: The disciples didn't know. Didn't understand. And it was hidden from them what kind of God Jesus is. But not Bartimaeus. Where the disciples don't know, he does. Where they didn't understand, he totally got it. Where it was hidden from them, it was revealed, clearly, to Bartimaeus:

Jesus is the kind of God who has mercy—that's why he cries out, "Have mercy on me!"

Jesus is the kind of God who fulfills His promises in the Old Testament—that's why he calls Him "Son of David," the king who will reign forever on the throne of David.

The God who takes flesh.

The God who loves His creation like this: He descends to be within His creation. To give them what is His, and take from them what is theirs.

Who gives holiness and takes sin.

Who gives life and willingly accepts their death.

Who opens heaven and suffers their hell on the cross.

And faced with that kind of God, Bartimaeus makes the simplest but most profound utterance of faith: "Son of David, have mercy on me!"

He doesn't need to tell Jesus what that mercy should look like. He doesn't have to. Because here is One whose very being defines mercy.

He doesn't need to spell out what's best for him—because the Son of David well knows. And whatever he receives from the hand of this merciful, self-giving God—that will be good. He'll take even a crumb from the master's table.

Because faith isn't concerned about what it gets, it's concerned about what it's attached to. And if it's attached to Jesus it has everything.

There's a powerful point in this, and this is the power of faith: not faith itself, but the One to whom it clings, Jesus. Faith says, "I can have blindness. I can have suffering. I can have loss, shame, and cross. But if I have Jesus, I have everything."

And that's exactly what Jesus shows. For the great miracle here isn't the restoration of Bartimaeus' sight. In fact, Jesus restores Bartimaeus' sight less for its value to Bartimaeus than for its value to proclaim who He is: the restoration of sight says that He is the promised Messiah.

To put that more pointedly and forcefully, the healing simply expresses the fact that Jesus is the fulfillment of all God's promises, the one in whom God's promises are Yea and Amen. "Go and tell John," Jesus had said, "what you see: the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the dead are raised, *and the poor have the good news preached to them.*" (Mt 11.5)

Good news, disciples! Everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets must be fulfilled. He will be delivered up. He will be mocked. He will be treated with outrage. He will be spat upon. He will be flogged. He will be killed. He will be raised on the third day. All this I willingly suffer. For you. Only believe it.

Good news, Bartimaeus! Your faith has saved you.

And Bartimaeus got up. And followed Jesus. Straight to where the goods were delivered. To the foot of the Holy Cross.

That's what faith does. It goes where the goods are delivered. To font and altar and pulpit. Where all God's promises in Christ are fulfilled. Where good news is preached even to you: your sins are forgiven. Your faith in that Christ has saved you.

Amen.

pax dei, etc.

sdg
jsb