

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Christians view the world differently. You live by faith in this world and not by sight. What does this mean? Well, God teaches you what this means this morning in the Gospel reading as he has saved you by grace through faith in Christ alone.

Faith is a real thing with a real object. The blind man “looks” to Jesus because he knows he is the only one who can show him mercy. Listen again to this account of what happened. “As he drew near to Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the roadside begging. And hearing a crowd going by, he inquired what this meant. They told him, ‘Jesus of Nazareth is passing by.’ And he cried out, ‘Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!’ And those who were in front rebuked him, telling him to be silent. But he cried out all the more, ‘Son of David, have mercy on me!’”

Here is this man, on the side of the road, begging. No doubt countless people have passed him by. Maybe some have looked down on him in his state. This day, though, he hears something going on. Something is different becomes someone different is coming his way. Jesus is passing by and that means everything. Take note of this first part. He knows something of Jesus. He’s heard of him and what he has done, the miracles he has performed and his preaching to the crowds. The blind man knows he is someone special. How he addressed Jesus as he is passing by is also telling. He calls out, “Jesus of Nazareth” first and then he cries out, “Jesus, Son of David” which is a messianic title. He attributes salvation to Jesus; he is the promised Messiah as God had foretold.

When he cries out to Jesus, then, he knows who is and he is wanting what Jesus gives. Faith receives Christ and his benefits. We are in error when we lose sight of that. When we think of having faith in Christ perhaps, we are tempted by many false images and voices which want us to think of it in terms of more akin to a support group. We think, “my faith will get me through this” as if I can somehow look on the bright side of things and think “it could be worse.” While there is some truth to this, when faith is simply this alone it runs the danger of being on unstable ground or turning into an idol. Faith, saving faith, in Christ though is so much more than that. It’s a blind man crying out for mercy even as people rebuked him and tried to silence him. Faith looks to Christ and clings to his promises.

To live by faith is to remain connected to Jesus crying out for mercy and receiving that mercy that he gives. We look away from ourselves, turn from our sin, and look only to Christ and his forgiveness. It’s to see him as he comes now and know the future to come trusting what he promises. It’s to see it all for you, applied to yourself. It clings to the means of grace; word and sacraments as the means by which you have faith, your faith is strengthened, and the way in which God keeps you in the faith.

This healing of the blind man is connected to what happened prior. At the beginning of this reading, the apostles were ignorant, it was hidden from them what Jesus said to them. The Lord was very clear, “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.”

This last Sunday of Pre-Lent the Lord fixes your eyes toward Jerusalem by placing before one who could not see with his eyes because he was blind. Though the twelve did not understand these words at this time, the blind man knew this Jesus passing by was and is the Son of David. The King has come to his people and heads toward his throne of the cross. Listen to this and straighten up your hearts and heads to see in faith your Lord who goes to suffer, die, and rise for you.

Hearing all this today, you are called to be faithful. Salvation is received by grace alone through faith in Christ alone. Don’t take this for granted or grow complacent. Hear and understand what all of this means as you now stand on this side of the cross, empty tomb, Ascension, and Pentecost. To be the people of God is to be a people of faith. It’s to be faithful in receiving the means of grace for without the means of grace you are not God’s people and there is no faith in

Christ. Perhaps another place we do well to examine our lives today is seen in the persistence of faith. Faith wants what God gives. It keeps wanting it, coming back to it, and receiving it. This is a living faith. A practical example of that for me as a pastor is heard when I talk with someone who hasn't been to church in a while. What is the first thing the person tries to tell me? It's always, without fail, "I have faith." The response to this I have given is "how?" The puzzling looks given me are a telling thing because it clearly shows that faith has no object or faith has been turned into something defined by the person. When there is a discussion, it often turns into a lot of language of "my faith does this, my faith is faith because I know in my heart I have faith" or "I know who Jesus is."

In these instances, faith has become a quality in a person rather than what we see in this reading and all throughout the Bible or just knowing who Jesus is does not constitute faith. Even the demons believe in Jesus, but they shudder at this. The Epistle reading says, "And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing." Faith simply for faith's sake God says is really nothing. Go back, though, to the reading for a minute and what did the blind man want? When told Jesus of Nazareth was passing by he simply didn't just say, "I have faith." No, instead, what did he say and do? He cried out for Jesus to have mercy on him. He wanted to Jesus to come to him and do something. He wanted Jesus to give to him and heal him not just be a nice sentiment in his heart. It's absurd and ridiculous to try to think one doesn't need to hear God's word and receive the Lord's Supper to be a Christian, you absolutely do and to reject these things is to reject the Lord himself. Our Lutheran Confessions confess this biblical truth on more than one occasion.

The blind man believed in Christ and shows you what faith looks like as he clings to the promises of Jesus and Jesus healed him. His words are words of praise, they call upon God's mercy. He teaches you, then, how you know God and look for him to act in Christ, God is merciful to you. This is the confidence and trust of faith the blind man shows and what the Lord has given to you as well.

Flowing from this faith is your new life of love that then lives in service to your neighbor. It's lived out as God describes in the Epistle reading when St. Paul gave the Corinthians a tongue lashing about their lack of love toward each other. God teaches you, however, what is good as true as you live in faith toward God and in fervent love toward one another as we pray in the post-communion collect. Your lives are to look like this which God says, "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, like faith, isn't an abstract thing but is active. And like faith, love isn't defined by how we define it rather it is seen in how God defines it. Simply saying "have faith" or "love is love" make nice bumper stickers or social media posts but beyond that they say nothing. Faith apart from God's appointed means or believing something different than God's word is not the Christian faith. Love, defined by human sinful desires or the whim of the day is not love but in fact is unloving and harms people even unto everlasting torment.

Understanding your faith as given by God in Christ and then lived out in love as a fruit of faith is what God teaches you today this Sunday before the start of Lent. Conform your hearts and minds to what the Scriptures teach you. Examine your life, see where you have sinned and repent. Confess your sin and look to Jesus. See with your ears looking to the Lord who loves with a perfect and everlasting love and is faithful at times. He is the one who has gone to the cross for you taking your sin upon himself and gives you forgiveness, life, and salvation in return. This is yours given to you in the waters of your baptism.

The Lord is here today and not just passing by on his way to somewhere else. You are not someone ignored. You, the people of God, are crying out, "Lord, have mercy upon us. Christ, have mercy upon us. Lord, have mercy upon us" and he has heard you. You are his people and he stoops down even now to hear and answer your prayers. He says, "I forgive you all of your sins" and "take, eat this is my body given for you. Take, drink this my blood shed for you for the forgiveness of your sins." Jesus has come today with healing and your faith has saved you/made you well because he does all things well.

Quinquagesima—February 11, 2024

Likewise, notice the boldness that comes from faith too. Have the confidence to go each and every day walking by faith as you go through this veil of tears. Look at the world differently, see everything through the lens of his word and have it be that which shows you what is truly reality and what is good, right, and true. Listen again to this conversation between the blind man and Jesus. “And Jesus stopped and commanded him to be brought to him. And when he came near, he asked him, ‘What do you want me to do for you?’ He said, ‘Lord, let me recover my sight.’ And Jesus said to him, ‘Recover your sight; your faith has made you well.’ And immediately he recovered his sight and followed him, glorifying God. And all the people, when they saw it, gave praise to God.”

Your God loves you and has shown you mercy. Your Lord knew what he must do 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 had a purpose for doing it and it was all accomplished for you. You have confidence today and you see what your Lord has done and still does as he is here for you. Rejoice with the blind man sing praises to the Lord who is near right now. Your faith trusts in Christ as you are baptized into him, as you are here listening to his word, and as you take into your mouths the very body and blood of Jesus given and shed for you. So, listen, and taste and see the Lord is good and how lovely is his dwelling place on this side of the grave.

See all of this today in your God given faith. See what was necessary for Jesus to do and what he did willingly all for your sake. See that his life in perfect obedience to the law of God is counted to you. See his mocking and suffering is for your benefit. See his death on the cross as the atonement for your sin and see that your sin is forgiven, and God’s wrath has been satisfied as it has been poured out upon Christ in your place. See the glorious resurrection from the dead as the proclamation that all has been fulfilled and accomplished and see that’s what you will do on the final day as the Lord will raise you up. See from the blind man where you are to look here and now with all of this having been done.

As you experience times of joy, suffering, trial, and even death face them as ones who see them with faithful eyes knowing that these things have been overcome by Jesus who endured these things in your place and promises you the day is coming where all sin, suffering, death, and the crafts and assaults of the devil will come to an end. Your prayers now are heard and answered by your Great High Priest who sits at the right hand of God interceding for you. Jesus is here for you and doesn’t pass you by rather he takes your cries of mercy to the throne of God.

Thanks be to God this day for the faith given by the Holy Spirit. Thanks be to God for his great compassion in Jesus, the Son of David, who has mercy on you. Fix your eyes on him and cling to his promises today that he is yours and has saved you by his blood. Cry out to him at times knowing that he hears and answers you and will never forsake you. Look toward Jerusalem as Lent approaches hearing and seeing your redemption accomplished by the one who stopped along the way to heal a blind man. Hear and understand that this was done all for you and go for your faith has saved you.

Confidently and with eager anticipation look forward to that day as well when your faith will end, and you will see the Lord face to face with your own two eyes no longer stained by sin and all it entails. That will be a glorious day indeed to be before the Lamb on his throne and join with all the saints in the unending hymn of glory that will not fade away. That’s what you have and what awaits you as you look here and now and know Jesus has done it and he is here at this font, lectern, pulpit, and altar. “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on us.”

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.