

Sermon for Quinquagesima Sunday - Luke 18:31-43

In the Name of the Father and of the Son ✠ and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

God's glory always hides in weakness. And it's been that way from the very beginning: The Lord God promised death to the serpent by woman's offspring. An heir of Adam and Eve would crush the head of the serpent and destroy death forever. It's little surprise that after giving birth to her first son, Eve exclaimed, "I have gotten a man with the help of the Lord." The Hebrew word Qa-yin means "gotten." Thus Eve had "qa-yinned" a son named Cain. This was the answer to their prayers! In fact, when Cain's brother was born, he was named Abel, which means, "vapor, a breath, vanity, or fruitlessness." Adam and Eve didn't seem to have much hope or care for what Abel would become. Their stock was in Cain. He would destroy Satan and death and then restore paradise, so she thought. And we know how well that worked out. Cain murdered Abel, while the Promised Savior would come through the line of Adam and Eve's other son named Seth.

In today's Old Testament reading, God's glory was hidden in weakness. The downtrodden prophet Samuel grieved over King Saul who chose to obey the voice of the people rather than the voice of the Lord. So the Lord commanded Samuel to find Israel's new king among the sons of Jesse who was from Bethlehem. Samuel looked at Jesse's oldest son. This man looked like a king—he was tall and he stood up straight. From Samuel's perspective, this was the new ruler of Israel. But God always hides his glory in weakness. Israel's king was not this son of Jesse or the other 7 sons who passed before the prophet. His chosen king was hidden in Jesse's smallest, youngest, ruddy son standing among sheep. But the unlikely David would go on to kill Goliath, among 10 thousands of other Philistines, and became one of the greatest kings of Israel. And yet, the greatest King of all would be among David's descendants, some 1,000 years later.

In today's Gospel this greatest King, this Son of David drew near to Jericho. A blind beggar, named Bartimaeus by St. Mark, asks some others in the crowd, "Who is coming up the road?" They tell him "Jesus of Nazareth." The blind man calls out loudly, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy upon me! Son of David, have mercy on me!" But others in the crowd rebuked him and commanded the blind beggar to be silent. "Keep quiet, you fool! Don't you know who this is? This is Jesus, the miracle worker who fed over 5,000 people. This is Jesus, the greatest Rabbi who taught the scribes in the temple as a boy, and who put the Pharisees and Sadducees to shame with His great wisdom! Stop embarrassing us with your yelling! Hush up or He's going to think that we're all like you — poor destitute beggars looking for handouts!"

But remember the blind man's request: he's not crying out for alms, for money given to the poor; he's crying out for mercy. So the blind man reveals his sight. He's not crying out to some rabbi or miracle worker. He's crying out to the Son of David, the One who goes to Jerusalem as a sacrifice, the One who rules as king by grace and mercy. Jesus calls for this blind man, perhaps the weakest person in the crowd, and our Lord reveals God's glory. The

Son of David grants his request. Christ has mercy and restores the blind man's sight.

Out of ignorance, Adam and Eve supposed that death's undoing would come by their son Cain. Human reason lead Samuel to imagine that David's older and stronger brothers made them better qualified to be Israel's king. Out of embarrassment and spite, the crowd outside Jericho rebuked the blind beggar.

So what's your excuse?

Why do you refuse to reach out to that annoying co-worker that everybody hates? Why won't you be friend to that fellow student whom the other kids make fun of and tease, the one who isn't like everybody else? Why don't you include that relative that none of the other family will talk to or invite? Why do you despise God's glory hidden in weakness? We have our reputations to uphold, of course. We have our pride and self-esteem to protect. We want to keep our status and that means maintaining the status quo. It's safer that way. Someone else will reach out. Someone else will be a friend. Someone else will include them. Why should I get involved in that mess? Well, don't be surprised when you're the one who's left out with nobody to care for you! What's more, when you despise others who are weak, you despise the Lord Himself—even as He said, "Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me."

But Jesus gets involved in our mess. He descended from the right hand of the Father to be born in a sloppy shelter for animals. He experienced all the hardships and hurts of this life, yet without sin. He stopped by the roadside to restore a blind man's sight. But that wasn't His final stop. "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." Jesus gets involved in mankind's mess. He is mocked. He is shamed. He is spit upon and flogged. He groaned. He sighed. He bled. He died. He stopped at nothing for you.

In His weakness called the cross, God hides His glory. And the Christ still forgives sinners by pronouncing His Word of forgiveness and life. He even interrupts your life on Sunday mornings and this coming Ash Wednesday to forgive your sins! God still hides His glory in weakness. Forgiveness for you is pronounced through these mere men. You are forgiven! Eternal life for you is found in water, bread, and wine. You are forgiven! God's glory is found in weakness for you. Amen.

The Peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen. ✂BJF✂