

Sermon for Quinquagesima Sunday – Luke 18:31-43

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

Faith and love are the two main points of today's Gospel. Faith is seen in the blind man who trusted Jesus would heal him. Love is seen in our Lord who would suffer, die, and rise again on the third day. Only by His death would the Scriptures be fulfilled.

Christ spoke these words about His death as a prediction. He was telling the future of what would happen to Him on that most Holy Week. He was speaking to His disciples as they traveled on their way to Jerusalem to the Passover. The disciples did not at all expect His suffering. They planned on enjoying this festival as they always had. After all, who goes to a county fair and expects tragedy? The Passover was for the Jews the greatest yearly celebration—a time to commemorate God rescuing His people from slavery in Egypt and destroying their enemies. Our Lord attended the Passover when He was 12 and the other years of His life as well. It was much the same for the other disciples. This was a time of great joy for the mighty acts God had done for them. Reliving God's mighty deeds in worship and rite brought great faith. Little did the disciples know that this particular Passover would instill in them even greater faith.

The Christ would go willingly to His suffering and crucifixion. He would willingly and gladly give Himself as a sacrifice. On Easter morning the angel admonishes the women searching for Jesus to remember the words He had previously spoken to them, so that they would know and even more firmly believe that He suffered this willingly for their good.

And this is where Christ's love comes in: Not only did He suffer and die, but it was His heart and will to suffer and die for us. This makes it all the difference. This is our comfort, confidence, and joy. Our Lord wanted this to happen—it was His will. When Christ predicts His suffering and death to His disciples it's as if He's saying to them and us: "Look into my heart. See that I do this willingly, freely, gladly. Don't be frightened or shocked when you see it. Don't think that I do this reluctantly, or that I'm forced, or that I have no other choice, or that the powerful and influential Jews are overwhelming me. I suffer this of my own will for you." This is the ultimate love. And so for us His death and resurrection is greater than every earthly joy.

Christ's death changed the way we see death, even our own death. What is death to me? Christ's suffering and death are my comfort in which I trust. Through it, my sins are forgiven. By His death, we are free to endure our death for the praise and glory of God and for the advantage and service of our neighbor. In Christ, death is our door to life. Only by Christ's death and suffering, none of my own work, or suffering, or death can help me stand before God in righteousness and purity. Only Christ.

And yet there was another main point in today's Gospel. Faith. We see faith exemplified in the blind man. His faith and confidence in Christ grew out of what he heard, and not what he had seen (obviously). He had no doubt that Christ would help

him as He had helped others. He couldn't have had this faith in his heart if he had not heard about Christ, for faith comes by hearing.

How did the blind man recognize Christ? He couldn't see Him—how would he know Him? What would distinguish Him from any other Jewish man passing by? How would he know if Christ had the heart and willingness to help him? He did the only thing he could: He believed what he had heard about Jesus. He based His confidence in Christ and therefore was not disappointed. Blessed is he who has not seen and yet believes.

Based on this faith, what does the blind man do? He calls out in faith. He prays. And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. With the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth, one confesses and is saved. The Word of Christ planted faith in the blind man's heart that was confessed with his mouth. This Word and faith came through hearing.

Frankly, we're in quite the same predicament. How would we know Jesus if we saw him? We have heard His voice. We have heard His Word. We have received His forgiveness. We confess with our mouths that Christ is Lord. The Word and faith come through hearing for us. And this faith does not go untested. For the blind man struggled with his conscience. He was unworthy to have this holy and worthy man called Jesus hear his request. Not only did his conscience tell him that, but those gathered around him did as well. They rebuked him and told him to be silent. So where faith exists struggle, strife, and doubt always accompany.

As Christians with a living faith in our hearts, it's easy to look at our failures. It's easy to look at our sufferings and the sufferings of those near and dear to us. It's easy to doubt. Adam's sons and Eve's daughters that we are, we do not see or know the kingdom of God. We feel and know blindness. We see only our failures, faults, and sins. We sigh for grace.

And then we hear Christ. As the blind man heard, so do we hear. The Son of Man accomplished all that was written by the prophets. He was delivered over to the Gentiles, mocked, shamefully treated, and spit upon. He was flogged and killed. But on the third day, He rose.

Hold firmly to this word of God. By it, we too have received our sight. Our work is now nothing but the honor of God. Our life is nothing but the praise of God. Our death is nothing but the glory of God. Serve the Lord with gladness. Close your eyes and ears to the devil, the world, and your sinful flesh. The Lord has set you free. Amen.

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