

HEARING, BELIEVING, SEEING, AND CONFESSING THE WORD

Hear again the Word of God as the pre-Lenten season enters its last three days in the countdown to the celebration of the Resurrection of our Lord:

Then none of them understood these things, for this word had been hidden from them, and they knew not the things continually being spoken (by Jesus)...Then at once he saw; and he followed [Jesus], continually glorifying God; and all the people beholding (this) gave praise to God.”¹

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ

The theme of the ending days of Pre-Lent this year is revealed in the manner in which St. Luke, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, paired the lack of spiritual insight of those close to our Lord with the use of the Faith by sight of the once blind man. The reality revealed today is that, through the Word of God, a man who had somehow heard of the Word and work of Jesus of Nazareth was able to “see” Him, without earthly vision, as the Messiah, the Christ. The brilliance of the joining of the Gospel truth that Jesus with His Word gives sight to the blind is awe inspiring. Hear again that which Jesus declared to those once blinded to the Good News Jesus declared about Himself, that which He came into this world to enact ...

For He will be handed over to the Gentiles and He will be mocked, and He will be treated seditiously, and He will be spat upon, then scourging (Him) they will kill Him, but by the third (day) He will resurrect.²

That, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, is what you know in the Faith, to be the Gospel of Jesus. In that now-fulfilled prophecy, Jesus declares the price for sin, and how it will be paid. His oft-repeated statement concerning the manner in which God would come with vengeance and recompense, now, as He speaks, is drawing to its culmination.

¹ Luke 18:34 and 43.

² Luke 18:31-33.

It is fitting to hear of this each year as the Church counts down the 50 days to the Feast of the Resurrection of our Lord. For, beginning on Ash Wednesday, we will enter the special 40 days of fasting and repentance. That time is given to us that we might remind ourselves of the multitude of reasons why, each day, God had to become one with us, and bear our sins. That was all to this end:

For He will be handed over to the Gentiles and He will be mocked, and He will be treated seditiously, and He will be spat upon, then scourging (Him) they will kill Him, but by the third (day) He will resurrect.³

That Jesus was handed over to the Gentiles, the unbelieving nations, is a fact. That reality had been declared for centuries – no, millennia – before it came to pass. Jesus voluntarily gave Himself into the hands of sinners, so that He might die in their sins – your sins, my sins and the sins of the whole world. If you are not a sinner in daily need of repentance and forgiveness, the message Jesus came to live out into death and then into eternal life is not for you!

Yet, all people have sinned and none remain perfect enough for a moment to remain in the Presence of the Living God. So, Jesus' words regarding His Passion, Death and Resurrection must be for you. They are given this day, that they might prepare your hearts, minds and spirits for the coming days of preparation for the Great High Feast of the New Covenant in Jesus' blood.

For most of us, the coming of Lent takes place in a world among peoples who do not recognize their state before an Holy God... if they acknowledge His Presence at all. They will not be preparing to keep the Feast in sorrow and contrition over this sins which separate them from the living God. I dare say, each and every one of us from the moment we were conceived until the instant the Word of God came to us and united us in the Faith, everyone was

³ Luke 18:31-33.

in that doomed state. Even so, when words about Jesus such as these came to us, in the manner in which we each were given to hear God's promises, God gave us the Faith:

He will be handed over to the Gentiles and He will be mocked, and He will be treated seditiously, and He will be spat upon, then scourging (Him) they will kill Him, but by the third (day) He will resurrect.⁴

To help us, to assist you, in understanding how the Faith is worked in the hearing of that Good News, each year on this day we have those words paired with unbelief and belief. The lack of faith is shown in those who should have been pillars of the Faith. The disciples had seen all that Jesus had come into the world to do – heal the sick, restore the lame, give the sound of the Word to the deaf, sight to the blind and life to the dead. The use of the Faith is displayed in one who had no sight, or had lost it at some point in his life. To help those who would be found faithful, St. Luke follows his record of Jesus' Good News proclamation with this confession:

Then none of them understood these things, for this saying had been hidden from them, and they knew not the things continually being spoken (by Jesus).⁵

That statement of the reality that even those who are with Jesus often miss His calling, is given to contrast with the event that follows. It stands to help us remember that just being around Jesus, even if we witness His miracles, is not enough to save us from our sins. No, we need the Faith – His Faith – to save us. That is, belief that Jesus actually came and did all that was necessary for us, for our salvation, to give us the ability to see our sinful states, to see our Savior and to be turned to Him for all we need for rescue from sin, eternal death and the wiles of the devil. Apart from the Faith which comes from

⁴ Luke 18:31-33.

⁵ Luke 18:34.

hearing the Word and God's gift of the Holy Spirit, we could not even rightly pray the biblically illumined words of today's collect —

O Lord, we implore You mercifully to hear our prayers, and, having set us free from the bonds of sin, defend us from all evil...⁶

That is what the disciples who heard Jesus speak of His coming Passion, Death and Resurrection should have prayed in response to His declaration of that Good News. Yet, *they knew not the things continually being spoken*. Against that, stands this eternal witness of God:

Then it happened in His drawing near to Jericho, (a) blind man sat alongside the way continually begging.⁷

Jesus had already declared that He was on His way to Jerusalem — to die. Now, the Evangelist Luke turns the narrative to that which began to occur. He states a fact: that as Jesus traveled to take His death for the sins of all people, He, and those with Him, happen upon a blind beggar. St. Luke does not give us the man's name; other texts name him as the "son of Timaeus." Luke does give details: that the man could not see and that he had the vocation of one who asked for alms. (Almsgiving was an important part of the Israelite religion at that time in history. So, the blind fellow was providing a service which provided opportunities for the "religious" of the day to meet their faith-obligations). From that, the narrative continues:

Then hearing the crowd going by, he enquired what this might be. Then they proclaimed to him that Jesus the Nazarene continues to come.⁸

With that, the Gospel record continues by informing us of a reasonable outcome of the blind man's response to the approach of Jesus and the crowds with him. You may have noted that those with the man called blind

⁶ Collect of the Day for Quinquagesima, adapted and revised from the *Evangelical Lutheran Hymnal*, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1931.

⁷ Luke 18:35.

⁸ Luke 18:36-37.

Bartimaeus, merely reported the presence of a man named Jesus, He Who was known to them as “the Nazarene.” That is, they who could see what was happening gave witness to the man Jesus. They did not testify that He was anything other than a guy from the small village of Nazareth, which was about as far away by mountain passes as Benson, AZ is from here – a walk of about 27 hours.

So, they declared Jesus, the Man, Who was headed southwest on His way to Jerusalem. (That is about a five-hour walk away, about the distance from here to Northwest Medical Center). There is no inkling of faith in the witness of those to the blind man regarding Jesus. What is the response of the one who could not see?

Then he cried out, continually saying, “O Jesus! O Son of David! You must have mercy on me!”⁹

The man begins and continues crying out, not for alms, but for mercy! Blind Bartimaeus has, up to this point, fulfilled his vocation and asked for mercy-gifts from men. Now he turns to request a gift of divine mercy from one he calls the Son of Man!

That indicates that the blind man had taken the messianic title for the Christ, and applied it to Jesus. Without anyone among those who told him about the approach of Jesus the Nazarene telling him of the divine nature of Jesus, he makes a leap of faith in addressing Jesus. He either had divine revelation on the spot, or, more likely, as a man in a thoroughly Jewish environment, culture and religion, he had heard of the Messiah of the Scripture, such as in our day’s text from Isaiah, where it says:

Elohim will come and cause to save all of you. Then shall be opened the eyes of blind men...¹⁰

⁹ Luke 18:38.

¹⁰ Isaiah 35:4c-5a.

Only by faith alone can anyone even begin to “see” Jesus for Who He is. That was the promise given by God through His prophet long ago. That means that the blind beggar outside of Jericho that day has faith! He “sees” Jesus by faith as the long-ago Promised Son of David who is David’s Lord. The witness of the Faith cannot be silenced, as our text continues.

Then those going rebuked him, that it might silence him, but he cried much greater, “O Son of David, You must have mercy on me!”¹¹

Faith’s response cannot be silenced by the will of man. Faith cries out, calling for mercy. Just so, do we in the Church, even through the season of fasting from Alleluias and glorias, will continue to cry out the prayer of the faithful: *Lord, have mercy; Christ, have mercy; Lord, have mercy.* You approach the Lord as did the once-blind man who saw by faith. In some form or other, week in and week out, we echo the cry of the faithful beggar in the Lord’s Divine Services. Jesus hears and responds to the Faith’s plea.

Then Jesus standing, ordered him to be led to Him. Then nearing Him, He asked him, “What to you do you continue to will I might do?”¹²

The man’s cry of the Faith is answered by God stopping, standing still. Jesus orders the man to be led by others to Him. In like manner, all who first enter into the Presence of the Lord in His Church are led by someone to the baptismal font. Jesus then addresses the one crying for mercy. He asks for the will, not just the hopeful expectation – the wish – of the blind man. The faithful man is being given the opportunity to confess that his will is in line with the will of God! To that, blind Bartimaeus makes faith’s confession. This is really your

¹¹ *Luke 18:39.*

¹² *Luke 18:40-41a.*

confession, that which is given by God through knowledge of and belief in the mystery of Jesus' Passion. The man responds,

Then he said, "O Lord, that I might see."

Then Jesus said to him, "You must look up. The Faith of you saved you."

Then at once he saw; and he followed [Jesus], continually glorifying God; and all the people beholding (this) gave praise to God.¹³

Here the one who cannot see with mortal eyes, declares that he can see by the Faith. Here, the mystery of the Passion which was not believed at that time by the disciples, is revealed to have been seen by the blind man. Jesus calls him, not to simply see again, but to "look up." He is calling the man to lift up His eyes to His Lord and Savior. Jesus declares that the Faith has saved, not just simply healed, the man.

Just so, the Faith of Jesus has saved you. He does more than heal you of earthly maladies from time to time, according to His will. He saves you from that which separates you from Him and the Father forever. The Faith hears the Word. The Faith believes the Word. The Faith sees the Word. Then, the Faith confesses the Word.

From that, the one in the Faith follows the Word of God through His Passion, Death and Resurrection. That means that you who are also in the Faith continually glorify God by hearing, believing, seeing and confessing the Word. **The peace which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus**

Quinquagesima (LSB One-year series)

Isaiah 35:3-7; I Corinthians 13:1-13; Luke 18:31-43

February 15, 2015

Pastor Michael A. Morehouse

Soli Deo Gloria

¹³ Luke 18:41b-43.