

Quinquagesima (*Esto mihi*)

St. Luke 18:31-43

February 19th, 2023

St. Bartholomew Evangelical Lutheran Mission, UAC

Fort Myers, FL

All Saints Evangelical Lutheran Mission, UAC

Pawleys Island, SC

Pastor Jerald Dulas

We Go Up to Jerusalem

In Nomine Iesu!

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Sermon Text:

And He took unto Him the twelve, and said unto them, "Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and all the things that are written through the prophets shall be accomplished unto the Son of man. For He shall be delivered up unto the Gentiles, and shall be mocked, and shamefully treated, and spit upon: and they shall scourge and kill Him: and the third day He shall rise again."

Prayer in Pulpit before Sermon:

Lord God, Heavenly Father, who through Thy Son Jesus Christ didst mercifully open the blind man's eyes, restoring his sight, we beseech Thee, with Thy Word so enlighten our hearts that knowing Thee through Christ, Thy Son and our Redeemer, we may in all temptations and afflictions look only to Thy mercy, and at all times find comfort and deliverance; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever One God, world without end. Amen.

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior + Jesus Christ. Amen.

The "Gesimas" or "Pre-lent" is a time of preparation for Lent. A time to do a little "spring cleaning" of the soul so that when Lent comes around, we do not have any obstacles in our way prohibiting us from focusing on the cross, and our salvation from sin, death, and the devil by Christ's sacrifice of death upon it. The previous two texts in Pre-lent may have helped get the cobwebs out of our minds so that we could hear about what Christ has done for us.

So now that those cobwebs have been cleaned out, our Lord + Jesus preaches into our ears today the very reason He came to this Earth. This is the preaching that is going to propel us into Lent, which starts this Wednesday with Ash Wednesday. The Lord + Jesus gathers His Apostles together and tells them that He must suffer, must be beaten, spit upon, and a whole host of other horrible things, including death. Then after we are told the Gospel of our salvation, we are told that the Apostles did not understand a single word of it. Their ignorance is repeated in three different ways by the Evangelist St. Luke. To which in response, we are immediately told of a blind man who receives his sight.

One might say that our Lord + Jesus does a little bit of "spring cleaning" of His own today. In today's Gospel we actually have two instances of blindness. There is obviously, the blindness of the man who begs the Lord + Jesus to give him sight. But there is also the "spiritual" blindness of the Apostles, who are clueless about what Christ tells them, namely, that He must die for the sins of the whole world.

These two events purposely contrast one another. Both the Apostles and the blind man have the Word of God. The Apostles have it plain and simple: “Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and all the things that are written through the prophets shall be accomplished unto the Son of man. For he shall be delivered up unto the Gentiles, and shall be mocked, and shamefully treated, and spit upon: and they shall scourge and kill him: and the third day he shall rise again.” We learn from the text that the Apostles have been told these things from two different sources. One, right here by the Lord + Jesus Himself, and two, the text says that it was written by the prophets. That means that the Apostles had it both preached to them, and it was written in their Scriptures, but they still did not understand.

The sad part is that not only did the Apostles not understand, but they did not believe it either. The reality of what they knew about this Man + Jesus—the miracles He did, the people He healed—did not make sense with what was being told them. How could anyone do these horrible things to this Man, Who does so much good in the world? It was beyond their comprehension. How could this Man + Jesus, who they believed to be the Son of God, die? Who would do such a thing? And so, reason took over against the plain and simple words of the Lord + Jesus. They should have believed it for the simple fact that the Lord + Jesus told them this. They should have believed it simply because it was God’s Word. But they did not. For we learn in other Scriptures that they tried to prevent Him, for example St. Peter after he made the good confession about the Lord.

There are many in the world who are still like that. They refuse to believe that the death of Christ actually atones for people’s sins. There are people who find it hard to believe that water connected to God’s Word, actually forgives sins, and gives eternal life and salvation. It is hard for even us to grasp onto the fact that when the pastor proclaims to us “your sins are forgiven” in the absolution that they are absolutely forgiven by the Lord God, as if He spoke the words Himself. The same is true of preaching, and the Lord’s Supper—how can these ordinary things grant forgiveness to a poor, miserable sinner such as me? How can such ordinary, plain, simple words do all that, along with giving me eternal life and salvation?

To us they can become just empty words because of our inherent unbelief, because we say them by rote and do not cling to them in faith. Holy Scripture teaches that a person who participates in the means of grace is going to have faith and life created and sustained in him by the Holy Spirit, Who works through the Word of God.

We are no different than the Apostles, we hear that Christ died for our sins, that we are forgiven purely out of fatherly divine goodness and grace, without any merit in me, but as soon as we hear it, we immediately look for something to add to it. Whether it be our works, or whatever else we tack onto grace in order to make salvation more tangible for us; something we can do by and for ourselves instead of letting the Lord + Jesus be the only source of our salvation.

Would not it be simpler if we just took our Lord + Jesus at His word, and believed what He has told us about salvation in the first place? Trust me, it is much more comforting to know that our salvation is entirely in God’s hands and He has already accomplished it, than trying to rely on something we have to do. The disciples, who could see clearly with their eyes, were “spiritually blind,” they were unbelievers, refusing to hear the plain preaching of Christ. Even though they had spent three years with Him and hearing and learning from Him. One might say, “seeing is *not* believing.” On the other hand, we also have this blind man who has not the use of his eyes, but he sees plainly the promises revealed in God’s Word.

This man has the same Word of God delivered into his ears as the Apostles. Which makes the truly miraculous thing in this text not that he received his sight, but rather that he believed the Word of God, which had been preached to him about the Son of Man—that He would save His people from their sins. In many ways this blind man is a picture of us—dead and blind in sins and trespasses, living only

by faith. And that is what faith is, it is trusting in things that cannot be seen, or understood, or grasped with reason.

It is a hard thing to tell someone that their sins are forgiven simply because God says so, on account of His Son, because they are probably going to ask you what else they need to do on top of that. Of course, the answer is “nothing.” But their mind cannot comprehend it; it has to be grasped solely by faith. Same thing with Holy Baptism: we say we have eternal life and salvation, because our sins have been washed clean in its waters, but we treat it as an event far in the past that has no relevance for today. We should be daily living in our Holy Baptisms, that is, daily drowning the Old Adam through repentance, so that in faith in the works of the Lord + Jesus, we may rise as new creations.

Some things that our Lord teaches can only be grasped solely by faith apart from any reason. Like for example the resurrection from the dead. We have never seen anybody rise from the dead, at least not someone who is truly dead, and not just near death. We have heard about Christ’s resurrection on the third day, as He teaches it in the Holy Gospel. And we have heard of all those who have died in the faith will be raised again on the Last Day and live in Heaven for all eternity. However, we have not experienced that, we have not died and been raised again, therefore when we say we believe in a resurrection, or eternal life, we do so simply by faith. We take our Lord at His Word and teaching.

That is what makes this blind man’s healing so miraculous. Because his “faith hath made [him] whole.” All he had was the word of the Lord + Jesus, that proclaimed to him, “receive thy sight.” The blind man was still blind when he heard “receive thy sight,” however, against all reason and understanding, he believed that he would see again. There you have your example of what it means to believe God’s Word; to hear it, and learn it, gladly keep it. All those things talked about in the meaning to the Third Commandment.

Our Lord + Jesus says something to us today that is near impossible for us to believe, because we were not there to witness it with our eyes. And, it was absolutely impossible for the Apostles to believe because they just could not imagine anyone would want to do that to this Man, but it is true. The Lord + Jesus is going up to Jerusalem to suffer and die for the sins of the whole world and on the third day rise again from the dead. Here we have the Gospel preached into our ears as we prepare for the beginning of Lent this Wednesday when we observe Ash Wednesday, the First Day of Lent.

The first half of this text is what Lent is all about—the suffering and death of Christ for our salvation. We, who are sinners, receive grace from God, because of His sacrifice. He offers up His life, so that we who are dead and blind in sins and trespasses may have forgiveness of sins, eternal life and salvation. This last Sunday of Pre-lent prepares us for that message, it opens up our spiritually blind eyes so that we can see clearly by faith that we are forgiven of our sins, that God has called us His children and claimed us as His own. Having had our eyes opened from the blindness of unbelief and doubt, we can see clearly that we have eternal life, we will rise from the dead, just as all those who have gone before us in faith have been raised from the dead. Our Lord + Jesus has won all this for us, and He has given it to us freely without any work or merit or anything else that we have to do. It is pure gift.

My dear friends, this Sunday has another name besides *Quinquagesima*, and that name if you look at the top of your insert is *Esto mihi*. It is taken from the first line of the *Introit*, it literally means “be to me,” or “be my.” And you will notice that the first phrase of the *Introit* is “Be THOU my strong rock, for an house of defense to save me.” That is what the Lord + Jesus becomes for us on the cross. He becomes for us a strong rock, an house of defense. On the cross He saves us from all of our sin. But He does even more for us, for although our weak minds cannot grasp onto what this cross means, by His Holy Ghost working through the constant preaching and participation in the Sacraments, He opens

up our blind eyes so that we might join with all of the angels, and archangels, and indeed all of the saints in Heaven, and praise God for rescuing us from sin, death, and the devil, eternally singing "Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all ye lands: serve the Lord with gladness." For, "Thou hast with Thine arm redeemed Thy people: the sons of Jacob and Joseph." In the Name of our Lord + Jesus, the Christ. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit after Sermon:

Almighty God, be pleased to accompany Thy Word with Thy Holy Spirit and grant that Thy Word would increase faith in us; bring into the Way of Truth all such as have erred; turn the hearts of the unrepentant; and for sake of Thy Name grant succor to all heavy hearts and those who are heavy-laden, that they may through the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ be relieved and preserved so that they succumb not to the temptation of despair but rather that they gain the victory over the world, the flesh, and the devil; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever One God, world without end. Amen.

The Votum:

The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria!