

Quinquagesima
11 February, Anno Domini 2018
St. Luke 18: 31-43
Pr. Kurt Ulmer

In the Name of the Father, and of the +Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Everything the prophets wrote about the Son of Man God brought to fulfillment because God sees what we try to pretend doesn't exist. When piercing eye of God looks right through our outward appearance, through the facade of goodness, through the shallow cover of what the world sees of us, He sees what lies behind it all. He sees the cuts and bruises of a turbulent marriage. He sees the emptiness and the loneliness of a life lived for myself by my own rules. He sees the despair and the guilt that continue to torment our consciences on account of our sin. He sees what the eyes of men could never see. He sees how we loathe our enemy, our neighbor, our family and friends, and even our brothers and sisters in Christ. He sees what we don't want to admit to anyone, not even ourselves - we aren't the caring, selfless, loving people we want God, ourselves, and everyone else to believe that we are. Our life is full of turmoil, pain, confusion, contradiction, and doubt. Our trust in God isn't rock-solid and immovable. Our flesh is weak and daily we fall into the traps and snares Satan plants in our paths. God sees even the darkness that we can't see in ourselves.

It saddens your Father and disappoints Him that the hearts of His most beloved creation have turned far away from Him. It pains Him that we have chosen the slavery of sin and self-glorification that leads to death rather than the freedom and peace of obedience and selflessness that lead to eternal life. He is grieved because we choose time and again to find pleasure and fulfillment in the things He has shown us lead only to judgment and condemnation.

And having seen all this, the Father did the only thing love could do, true love, not our perverted, selfish, made up version of love which whispers cruel words about those we call "loved ones", which adulterates the marriage bed with those whom our heavenly Father hasn't joined to us in marriage by His Word, which abandons and ignores the weak, the vulnerable, and the broken - He sent His beloved Son, Jesus, to Jerusalem to be delivered to the Gentiles, to be mocked and shamefully treated and spit upon, to be flogged and killed. He

loved you, he loved each and every sinner, with an everlasting love. What our sin-stained reason and vengeance-driven hearts could never imagine or understand or see, the God of heaven and earth did without hesitation - He loved us poor sinners who hated Him. He offered up the sinless, spotless flesh of His only-begotten Son as the atoning sacrifice for all the things that we want to pretend aren't true about us.

You have not loved God as you ought. But your love of God doesn't save you. It is His great love for you. He has seen your wretched condition and gladly sent forth His Lamb to spill His innocent Blood to reclaim you. He has seen while you blindly stumble about in your sin, hurt yourself time and again, grasp at every empty, meaningless so-called pleasure the world dangles in front of you. He has watched as you grope about for comfort when the darkness of your sin and guilt surround you and fill you with the fear of hell and the terror of God's righteous judgment. Because of what He has seen, because of the clarity of His sight into your heart, He has He patiently and silently endured the mocking, the scourging, the false accusations, the nails, the spear, and the thorns. He has washed you in the waters of Holy Baptism so that, no longer blinded by sin and deluded self-interested reason, you might see Jesus your Savior in repentance and faith. The next six weeks of fasting and bodily preparation are certainly fine outward training. But the true preparation is the hardest. It can only be accomplished in you by God Himself speaking His Almighty Word, the bright light of truth. It means being brought to death. It means daily drowning your Old Adam with all his sins and evil desires as you remember your +Baptism. It means confessing that there is nothing good whatsoever in your flesh. It means that you must cast aside your wisdom as foolishness and receive the foolishness of God, the cross, as the highest and purest and only wisdom.

We struggle against the same blindness that plagued the disciples and the crowds that followed Jesus. We want to think of Him as little more than a spiritual guru or example who makes us feel good. Our Old Adam wants us to think so much of ourselves that all we need from Jesus is a little cheerleading and encouragement, a shout from the sidelines "You can do it!" That is blindness. That is the demonic blindness that enables us to casually set aside the Means of Grace for sports, jobs, relationships, and soft pillows. Why don't we want to hear more of God's Word? Why do we turn up our noses at the opportunity to comb through it and be saturated in it? Because we don't like what it says about us. Because it is easier to say whatever we want and

change it if need be. Or, as Jesus, put it elsewhere “This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil.” (Jhn. 3:19) That is a blindness that leads to despair when the flood waters of sin come crashing in over our soul. That is a blindness that leads to death.

Jesus came for sinners, not those who believe that they are righteous and have no need of God's mercy. If mercy is what you seek, then you have come to the right place because here your Savior pours out mercy at no cost and without limit. Here the Shepherd tends to lost and wounded sheep, binding up the broken-hearted, strengthening the weak, absolving the guilty. Here not only does your Lord proclaim to you the forgiveness of all your sin and promise eternal life to all who believe, but He actually puts in your mouth what He accomplished on the cross - Body and Blood given and shed for you. Here from the mouth and pierced side of the One who is light and life and salvation shines forth mercy and compassion, healing, hope, and strength. Here God accomplishes and fulfills all that He has promised. Here He opens the eyes of the blind. And though you are still plagued in this life by doubt, fear, and guilt, the love of God endures forever - love that went up to Jerusalem, love that looked in compassion on your misery and clothed you in the royal baptismal garment of Christ's righteousness. That is what your Heavenly Father sees. He sees Jesus. And He has opened your eyes so that you too may look upon the Son of David who has had mercy upon you.

In the Name of +Jesus. Amen.