

Sermon for Sunday, April 6, 2025

Luke 18:31-19:10

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable to you Oh Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

Help Us See!

Today is the last Sunday of Lent. For the last few weeks we have been hearing and seeing the parables of Jesus during worship and allowing those teachings to inform our answers to the question, "How then shall we live?" We did not hear parables today. We heard the stories of two men who made the decision to follow Jesus. From their choices we are provided with answers to the question "How then shall we live?"

My outline for today's sermon includes talking about those who can and cannot see. Then I'm going to talk about what those who were gifted with sight teach us about how to live.

The Scripture reading opens with Jesus predicting his death in pretty graphic details including insults, spitting, flogging and death. This is the third time that he makes this prediction, but the disciples didn't understand the first two times and they don't understand now. In this particular reading the claim is made that "what he said was hidden from them" the implication being that somehow God or Jesus clouds their comprehension so that they cannot understand. The disciples cannot "see" or comprehend what Jesus is talking about, even though he has told them quite clearly. The disciples were blind. There's a hint of irony in this scene because these people had spent months being tutored by Jesus and yet they couldn't comprehend his destiny and what it meant to be "messiah."

Next comes the story of the blind man sitting on the side of the road. He isn't given a name in Luke's telling of this story. Now the ability of this blind man to "see" in this story is interesting. On the one hand his eyes do not work—he is physically blind. On the other hand he has a depth of perception about Jesus and his true identity that is quite remarkable.

The scene opens with the blind man asking the crowd what is happening. They tell him Jesus of Nazareth is passing by. That's when the blind man starts making a ruckus and calling out "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" Notice that there's a

discrepancy between the information the crowd gives him and what he actually says. The crowd simply says that Jesus is from Nazareth. The blind man gives Jesus the title, Son of David." This is a messianic title: meaning the blind man is naming Jesus as the promised one. So somehow the blind man knows something extraordinary about Jesus and he isn't afraid to name it by calling him "Son of David." He can see even when his eyes do not work.

In fact he carries on so loudly that the crowd tries to shush him. One might even argue that the crowd cannot see Jesus' true identity. But the blind man can and he keeps on using the honorific "Son of David." Maybe those words are what got Jesus' attention. At any rate Jesus stops and takes the time to ask what the blind man wants. "Lord, let me see again." He asks for his eyes to be healed.

Jesus accommodates the blind man and heals his vision. Part of what's remarkable about this story is that the blind man is brave enough to keep on calling until he gets Jesus' attention. Are we that brave? Another part of what's remarkable about this story is that the blind man recognizes Jesus' true identity when it is debatable about whether the rest of the crowd does. (Are we able to recognize Jesus?) Finally notice Jesus says, "your faith has saved you." The blind man had a high level of faith in Jesus' ability to heal him. If not, he wouldn't have even bother to call out. Yes, in that way the blind man's faith saved him or restored his vision. (Is our faith that intense?)

The final scene in today's reading is about Zaccheus. Like the blind man, he wants to see Jesus. He achieves that goal when he climbs a tree in spite of the potential shame that the crowd might have heaped upon him. He is rewarded for his efforts by being recognized by Jesus. Why do we like this story? Simply because all of us have felt small, short, inadequate and unseen. And we want Jesus to see us, to notice us, to call us out of the tree in which we are hiding. The question then is whether we are brave enough to go look for Jesus. Are we brave enough to climb the tree?

So then how shall we live?

- We need to be brave; audacious even. We need to be like both the blind man and Zaccheus and do whatever it takes to see Jesus. We need to be brave enough to call out without stopping like the blind man: even when the crowd tries to shush us, tries to muffle our voice. Don't feel brave enough to call out? Then climb a tree. Recognize the possibility that teasing or harassment might occur and act upon your deep

desire to see Jesus anyway. We need to be brave and even audacious enough to recognize that Jesus will make himself visible to us.

- How then shall we live? We need to be open to change or perhaps expect surprise. The blind man wanted to see. He was given that gift and his response was to follow Jesus on the way. The Scripture says, "Immediately he regained his sight and followed him, glorifying God." The blind man changed his lifestyle from begging to praising God.
- Zaccheus' surprise was different. First he is seen by Jesus and acknowledged. Then he finds himself the host of a dinner party with the primary guest being the one he worked so hard to see: Jesus. Being a practical sort of person—I can only imagine the word going to the kitchen staff that there is going to be a feast! What a ruckus that would create behind the scenes! Yet that's an important point because the interaction between Jesus and Zaccheus has far-reaching implications that extend beyond their face-to-face conversation.
- Are you ready for a change like the blind man? Are you ready for a surprise like Zaccheus? If the opportunity is presented are you brave enough to step into it? N.T. Wright put it this way, "Where Jesus is, there salvation is to be found, for those who accept him as master and *reorder* their lives accordingly. (Luke for Everyone, page 223) The blind man "reordered" his life.
- Zaccheus also reordered his life based on his experience of Jesus' love. He made the choice to provide compensation to any and all that he may have cheated through his business dealings. While the blind man physically followed Jesus to Jerusalem we don't have any indication that Zaccheus did the same. Indicating that he was going to provide compensation suggests that he would remain in his home in Jericho. He had important work to do there. The point is that whether you follow like the blind man or remain at home, a change of heart occurs and an action is taken. That's repentance folks.

These men were men who could see. One could argue that Luke included these three scenes in the gospel in this manner because they demonstrate those who could and could not see. My encouragement to you today is to strive to "see." Jesus will help you to see. It might be through the physical healing of your eyes.

But it might also be through the healing of your spiritual eyes that allow you to see Jesus in the people around you.

There is a story about a newspaper reporter who went to Calcutta to interview Mother Theresa. He was amazed at her dedication and caring as he walked with her through the Kalighat Home for the Dying that she established. He questioned her dedication to the many dying people in that building. She responded by kneeling next to a man on a mat and washing his face. She turned to the reporter and said, "I do this because I see Jesus in the eyes of this man." May we all have our eyes opened to see Jesus in the people around us. Amen.

- I read a comment made by Rev. Fred Craddock that I feel compelled to read to you. Rev. Craddock wrote the following about Zaccheus 35 years ago, "while nothing of the private life of Zaccheus is revealed in the story, this much we know on principle: no one can be privately righteous while participating in and profiting from a program that robs and crushes other persons. Such dichotomous thinking has been a blight on the church throughout its history, especially in those times and places in which individualism has dominated over community and the sense of being members of one another." (Fred Craddock, Interpretations series, Commentary on Luke, pages 218-19.)