

“And Jesus said to him, ‘Receive thy sight. Thy faith hath saved thee.’”

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St. David’s Anglican Catholic Church
Charlottesville, Virginia

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¹ This sermon was originally written on the Gospel for Holy Communion on Quinquagesima Sunday, 2008.

² *The Table of Lessons*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxiv (Anglican Church of Canada 1962).

³ Exodus 1:8-14, 22—2:10 (KJV).

⁴ St. Luke 18:35—19:10 (KJV).

⁵ St. Luke 18:42 (KJV).

SERMON FOR MORNING PRAYER
The Fourth Sunday in Lent¹
(Year I)

The Rev’d Warren E. Shaw, Priest Associate

Lessons:²

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the eighth Verse of the first Chapter of Second Book of Moses, called Exodus.³

“... Now there arose up a new king over Egypt, which knew not Joseph. And he said unto his people, Behold, the people of the children of Israel are more and mightier than we: Come on, let us deal wisely with them; lest they multiply, and it come to pass, that, when there falleth out any war, they join also unto our enemies, and fight against us, and so get them up out of the land. Therefore they did set over them taskmasters to afflict them with their burdens. And they built for Pharaoh [**FAY-row**] treasure cities, Pithom [**PIE-thahm**] and Raamses [**ray-AM-zeze**]. But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew. And they were grieved because of the children of Israel. And the Egyptians made the children of Israel to serve with rigour: And they made their lives bitter with hard bondage, in mortar, and in brick, and in all manner of service in the field: all their service, wherein they made them serve, was with rigour.

“... And Pharaoh [**FAY-row**] charged all his people, saying, Every son that is born ye shall cast into the river, and every daughter ye shall save alive.

“And there went a man of the house of Levi [**LEE-vye**], and took to wife a daughter of Levi [**LEE-vye**]. And the woman conceived, and bare a son: and when she saw him that he was a goodly child, she hid him three months. And when she could not longer hide him, she took for him an ark of bulrushes, and daubed it with slime and with pitch, and put the child therein; and she laid it in the flags by the river’s brink. And his sister stood afar off, to wit what would be done to him.

“And the daughter of Pharaoh [FAY-row] came down to wash herself at the river; and her maidens walked along by the river’s side; and when she saw the ark among the flags, she sent her maid to fetch it. And when she had opened it, she saw the child: and, behold, the babe wept. And she had compassion on him, and said, This is one of the Hebrews’ children. Then said his sister to Pharaoh’s [FAY-roze] daughter, Shall I go and call to thee a nurse of the Hebrew women, that she may nurse the child for thee? And Pharaoh’s [FAY-roze] daughter said to her, Go. And the maid went and called the child’s mother. And Pharaoh’s [FAY-roze] daughter said unto her, Take this child away, and nurse it for me, and I will give thee thy wages. And the woman took the child, and nursed it. And the child grew, and she brought him unto Pharaoh’s [FAY-roze] daughter, and he became her son. And she called his name Moses: and she said, Because I drew him out of the water.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the thirty-fifth Verse of the eighteenth Chapter of the Gospel according to St. Luke.⁴

“And it came to pass, that as he was come nigh unto Jericho, a certain blind man sat by the way side begging: And hearing the multitude pass by, he asked what it meant. And they told him, that Jesus of Nazareth passeth by. And he cried, saying, Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me. And they which went before rebuked him, that he should hold his peace: but he cried so much the more, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me. And Jesus stood, and commanded him to be brought unto him: and when he was come near, he asked him, Saying, What wilt thou that I shall do unto thee? And he said, Lord, that I may receive my sight. And Jesus said unto him, Receive thy sight: thy faith hath saved thee. And immediately he received his sight, and followed him, glorifying God: and all the people, when they saw it, gave praise unto God.

Jesus could not have made it any plainer: “*The Son of man shall be delivered to the Gentiles, [as it is written of him] and shall be mocked, and spitefully entreated, and spitted on: and they shall scourge him, and put him to death; and the third day he shall rise again.*” But the disciples at this point were blind. They simply could not see it: “*They understood none of these things: and this saying was hid from them.*”

We now know what the disciples later came to know. We know the Passion narrative and the Easter story. It is through that lens that we look upon the holy season of Lent. We follow the path of repentance, humility, sacrifice, obedience, and reliance on the goodness and faithfulness of God because we know that the way of sorrows, the *Via Dolorosa*, is the narrow path that leads to eternal life.

We reject, as Jesus did, and as Adam did not, the temptations and lies of the serpent. We follow Jesus, as the blind man did, with our eyes opened, because we read the Scriptures through the lens of the Cross and the empty Tomb.

It is through that same lens that we are able, if we have faith, to look back our own lives and see the hand of God at work. It is through that same lens that we need to look upon the penitential season of Lent and see our sins destroyed in the fire of God’s love.

By that same faith and through that same lens we look forward to the fulfillment of God’s promise that we shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore, for the Lamb of God in the midst of us will guide us to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from our eyes.

This is not the false promise of the serpent, it is the promise of a faithful God. It is the promise of the Kingdom of God, which Jesus came to bring and which all of us, like the blind man, can enter only by faith.

The Kingdom of God is a kingdom of light. There is no darkness. Nothing is hidden that will not be revealed, and, as Isaiah says, *“the eyes of the blind will be opened.”* So what this man was really asking for was really the Kingdom of God, and he knew by faith that Jesus was the One to bring it all about. That is why he called Him *“Son of David”*, a messianic title.

The serpent made a promise to Eve in the Garden of Eden: *“If you eat this fruit, your eyes will be open and you will see clearly.... You will be like God, knowing good and evil.”*

Ever since then, people have believed the lie. It is a lie is that you don’t need God to arrive at knowledge of the truth. It is a lie is that you can write your own definition of right and wrong. It is a lie is that rebellion against God, stepping out of your place in the order of creation, will lead to enlightenment. That kind of rebellion does not lead to light but to darkness. It does not lead to life but to death. So Jesus says to the blind man, *“Your faith has saved you”*.

In the Kingdom of God, there is no hunger or thirst. There are no social outcasts in the Kingdom of God. So the instincts of the blind man were right: *“Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness,”* says Jesus, *“and all these things will be added to you.”*

The disciples also believed that Jesus was the One Who would bring the Kingdom of God to earth. That is why they left everything behind and followed Him. But they thought He would bring in the kingdom the use of force and through involvement in politics. Jesus kept trying to tell them that was not His way. The Kingdom would come through sacrifice and reliance on the goodness and power and faithfulness God. It would come through patience, repentance, humility, service, and obedience to the will of God. It would come through Crucifixion and Resurrection.

“And Jesus entered and passed through Jericho. And, behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus [**zah-KEY-uss**], which was the chief among the publicans, and he was rich. And he sought to see Jesus who he was; and could not for the press, because he was little of stature. And he ran before, and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him: for he was to pass that way. And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up, and saw him, and said unto him, Zacchaeus [**zah-KEY-uss**], make haste, and come down; for to day I must abide at thy house. And he made haste, and came down, and received him joyfully. And when they saw it, they all murmured, saying, That he was gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner. And Zacchaeus [**zah-KEY-uss**] stood, and said unto the Lord; Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold. And Jesus said unto him, This day is salvation come to this house, forsomuch as he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: *“And Jesus said to him, ‘Receive thy sight. Thy faith hath saved thee.’”*⁵ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Homily:

There is more than one blind man in this morning’s Second Lesson. There are in fact only two people who are not blind. One of them is Jesus; the other one is the man that Jesus healed. Everyone else is blind—not physically, but spiritually. The disciples especially are blind to what Jesus has been telling them about Himself and His mission. They are blind to what is written in the Scriptures. They are blind to what is about to happen. They do not see it coming.

Jesus has been telling His disciples that He is going to be rejected, mocked, insulted, and killed and that He will rise from the dead on the third day after His death. This is the nature of His messiahship. This is His mission. This is His destiny. And all this is foretold in the Old Testament Scriptures. But *“they understood none of these things; and this saying was hid from them, neither knew they the things which were spoken.”*

It’s easy for us, with hindsight, to look back on the disciples and wonder how they could have been so blind. But the reason it is easy for us is that we are able to look back through the lens of the Crucifixion and the Resurrection.

It is when the disciples look back through that lens at the events of Our Lord’s life and the experiences they had with him that they too are able to understand. It is when Jesus appears later in this same Gospel to two of His disciples on the road to Emmaus on Easter Evening that He opens to them the Scriptures and enables them to read The Old Testament correctly.

It is when St. Paul looks back through that lens that he has his eyes opened and he is able to see how wrong he was in his interpretation of the Scriptures. He confesses to the Corinthian church that he once regarded Christ from a human point of view but that he now no longer so regards Him. Like us, Paul did not know Christ in the flesh, but he met Him in His risen glory, and he was blinded by the encounter until he learned from a disciple about the Cross and the Resurrection. He then wrote, as the Gospel writers did, through the lens of that experience.

It is through the lens of the Crucifixion and Resurrection of Jesus that the Church reads the Old Testament Scriptures. The fathers of the Church looked through that same lens when they developed the great doctrines and creedal statements of the Church. And the martyrs look at their own sufferings through that same lens.

The Crucifixion and Resurrection of Jesus make everything clear that has gone before and everything that is yet to come. It is they that illuminate the mystery of life, and without that illumination, everyone is blind.

The beggar in today’s story could not see all of that. But he could see part of it. He could see what most of the crowd could not. Instead of becoming bitter, as many have done who suffer adversity in this world, this man did not scorn the word of God which he no doubt heard read regularly in the synagogue. He did not bewail his lot in life and he did not curse those who scorned him. He simply turned to the One Person he knew could change his life forever: *“Jesus, thou son of David, have mercy on me.”*

The blind man could see that Jesus was much more than a bread messiah. You may recall that Jesus in His wilderness experience was tempted to become exactly that.

The beggar could see that Jesus was much more than a great teacher or even a great prophet. He could see that Jesus was not just another leader of political protest against injustice and Roman imperialism. That was another temptation that Jesus faced and rejected.

This man could see that Jesus was the One Who could open his eyes and bring light into his dark life. So when Jesus asked him what he wanted, he did not ask for money. He did not ask for food. He asked for light. He asked to have his eyes opened so that he could see the real Jesus and follow Him.

The real Jesus began His public ministry by announcing the arrival of the Kingdom of God. His parables were parables of the Kingdom. His teachings were about the values and relationships that prevail in the Kingdom of God. His whole ministry centered around establishing the Kingdom of God on earth and showing the way and opening the way for people to enter it.