

Last week, we heard Jesus's exhortation: "He who has ears to hear, let him hear," teaching about the connection between our ears and our heart. This week, we see an example of the connection between our eyes and our heart. In the account of Jesus healing a blind man outside of Jericho, we're shown the difference between what our physical eyes see and what the eyes of faith see.

As we learn to look with the eyes of faith, given to us purely by the grace of God, we'll see the incredible blessings that Jesus gives to us, just as the blind man did.

Right off the bat, we're given an example of it looks like when there's a disconnect between faith and everything else. Jesus takes the twelve disciples aside and tells them this: "See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished. For he will be delivered over to the Gentiles and will be mocked and shamefully treated and spit upon. And after flogging him, they will kill him, and on the third day he will rise."

Jesus here foretells His coming passion, death, and resurrection. And He does it about as clearly as you could want. This isn't like last week, where He teaches in parables, where parts of the story mean or point to other things. Here, flogging means flogging. "They will kill Him" means that He will be killed.

But unlike last week's parable, where the disciples ask for Jesus to explain, that they might grow in faith, here they remain silent. They don't understand, but they also don't seek to understand. Though they have ears and eyes, the truth is hidden from them. Their eyes of faith are held shut.

In contrast, we then meet someone whose physical eyes are blind, but whose eyes of faith are wide open. We read, "As he drew near to Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the roadside begging." Yet as this poor man sits there, he hears something happening. Someone's coming. Someone of significance, judging by the noise of the crowd and perhaps the excitement in the air. He asks what's going on, and people respond, "Jesus of Nazareth is passing by." Hearing this, the beggar cries out, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" But those standing near him tell him to pipe down, to be silent. Why?

Here's the first place where the difference between what our eyes see and what's truly happening can be noted. And here, the difference at first is one of historical difference, what we see in our mind's eye while we read this account versus what the people then would've seen.

For someone today, casually reading through this account, it might not seem too odd or strange. Jesus, who is a popular teacher and who therefore often has a crowd around Him, is entering into a city. When people in need heard He was coming, they would often cry out, that He might heal them. We've read about this before; nothing too unusual, right?

Yet for the people watching this unfold, the events very likely would've seemed like more than that. For those in Jesus' day, this probably seemed like a reenactment of a royal or imperial visitation.

What do I mean by that? In that day, when a great king, or the Roman Emperor, came to a city, there were certain events that often took place.

As Caesar and his retinue approached, the people would gather outside to greet him with cheers and praises. In addition to the praise, they would also cry out “Kyrie eleison!” You might know that from our liturgy as meaning “Lord, have mercy!” They would ask Caesar for mercy, that he would deliver them from the barbarians, or fix their aqueduct, or give them justice, or whatever.

As the retinue went along, every now and then Caesar would halt the procession and command one of the people to be brought to him. He would ask what this person would he might grant them, and then in a show of his benevolence and power he would grant the request. The people would cheer the greatness and generosity of Caesar, who would then continue on his way.

Do you see those elements unfolding as Jesus approaches Jericho? They’re all there! The thing is, though, the people didn’t see them by faith. No, they may very well have thought this was a mockery, poking fun at Caesar. As we know from other places in the Gospels, there was already quite a bit of friction between the Jews and Rome, and the Empire had no freedom of speech for conquered peoples.

If word of this perceived parody got to the authorities, the Legions might pay Jericho a visit, and it would be none too friendly. And so they tell the beggar to be quiet, lest he bring the anger of Rome down on their heads.

But the blind man, by faith, sees what’s really going on. At some point prior, the seed of the word had been scattered into his heart and there found good soil to grow. What he had heard from the Old Testament and its many prophecies concerning the Messiah, and then the word about the works and teaching of this Jesus of Nazareth, had been used by God the Holy Spirit to give him faith in Jesus. By grace, he believed that Jesus was the Messiah, the Savior sent from God to take away the sins of the world, to lead his people to salvation, to be Immanuel – God with us.

That faith then brings forth fruit, namely the confession of Jesus as Messiah. That’s what the beggar is crying out: “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” The title “Son of David” was a title of the Messiah. And the cry “Have mercy on me!” was one that God’s people have been praying to God throughout the ages.

Despite being physically blind, this man can see the truth that no one else seems to see. This is a royal visit, but not of some earthly king or emperor. This is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords who approaches. This is the God who is mercy, and so the man cries out for mercy. He will not be silent. He will not suppress the fruits that faith is bearing in his heart. He cries out his confession of faith all the louder, “Son of David, have mercy on me!”

Jesus, the Lord who gave this faith, then responds to this fruit of faith, and He does so acting as the Great King. He stops the procession and, acting as the benevolent King, commands the beggar to be brought forward. He then addresses the man, “What do you want me to do for you?”

The response of the beggar shows again the incredible faith he possesses, for he responds, “Lord, let me recover my sight.” No earthly king, no matter how great, has the power to grant such a

request. But he isn't asking an earthly king. The beggar believes this Jesus of Nazareth is The Lord, Yahweh, Immanuel, the One with whom nothing is impossible.

And Jesus then, as God and King, declares with words that sound just like a king giving a decree: "Recover your sight." Immediately – because reality itself must yield before the King – the man's sight is restored. The King has graciously granted the request of His beloved subject, and that man responds in faith by following Him – becoming a disciple, a follower – and glorifying God. He joins the royal retinue as all those witnessing praise God who had done such great things among men.

That day outside Jericho, the King of Creation had come to visit His people, and the one man who by faith recognized His visit was blessed by the King, both temporally and eternally. His sight had been restored, and His faith had saved Him.

Not long after that remarkable day, another event would take place that would sharply distinguish between what physical eyes see and what the eyes of faith behold: the crucifixion.

What would the eyes of unbelieving men see on that Friday? Some would see just another rabble-rouser and potential insurrectionist being put down by the Romans. Others would see a man who didn't appear to have done anything wrong but who nevertheless had run afoul of the jealousy of the Jewish leaders and therefore had to die for the sake of peace. Not a few would see hope being cut off, the end of the one who might have redeemed Israel. Those most blinded to the truth would stand at the foot of the cross and see a blasphemer to be mocked, someone who had saved others but couldn't save himself.

But what was really happening there on Golgotha? That would be seen by the eyes of faith in those who witnessed it, even as some of them were given those eyes, that faith, on that very day. A thief would confess his guilt and the innocence of Jesus, and ask Jesus, as the King, to remember him when He came into His Kingdom.

A centurion – a Gentile and almost certainly someone raised as a pagan – would hear the words of forgiveness and grace from Jesus' mouth and see the way in which He died, and through the faith given him there declare, "Truly this was the Son of God!"

St. John, the beloved disciple and the only one of the Twelve to be at the cross, would see the blood and water flowing from Jesus' pierced side and by faith realize that these were the elements that God would use to cleanse His people. When he would write the fourth Gospel, John would be inspired to pause in the crucifixion narrative just to emphasize how important this blood and this water are. From the side of Jesus comes not merely physical proof of death, but even forgiveness, life, and salvation.

The world sees Jesus on the cross as repulsive and wrong, but by faith the Church sees the Lamb of God being slain for the sins of the world.

Those wonderful gifts given at the cross are ours still today, given to us by our gracious Lord and King and God in the life of His Church. For those outside, looking only with human eyes and human reason, the Church doesn't appear like anything especially grand. Perhaps people see a bunch of old-fashioned sticks in the mud, unwilling to get with the times. Or maybe they see a bunch of

people they think to be delusional, wasting their time and money on fairy tales. Those who might be the most charitable, but still without faith, may see a group of people devoted to old tales and rituals that teach good morals and help people be nice, but which don't have any real substance.

Yet the truth of what our Lord gives us, which is seen by faith, is greater than anything this life has to offer. Through faith, we see the Bible as the actual words of the true and only God, spoken through those who serve as heralds to the Almighty King. When we as sinners come before God lamenting our sins and asking for forgiveness and for the strength to change our ways, we hear the King declare our trespasses forgiven, our debt to Him paid by His own blood, as well as the promise of strength for the days to come.

When we pray to our Lord, the God of the Universe gives us His complete attention, hearing our words with the same love and compassion with which Jesus heard the blind beggar's request. When we approach the altar, by faith we see that we are coming into the wedding feast of Christ Himself, being given a glimpse of that eternal feast as our God temporarily rends the division between heaven and earth and comes to us, bringing with Him the angels, archangels, and all those saints who have gone before us.

When we sing our hymns to God, we are joining the innumerable host gathered around the throne of God singing His praise. When the benediction is spoken before we depart, by faith we realize that it isn't just some poetic words to close the service, but is just as real and binding as when God Himself first directed Aaron the high priest to use it to bless the people of Israel.

God's presence and blessing are given to us by grace, beheld by faith. This again is seen first and foremost in the cross and then where those gifts from the cross are given in Word and Sacrament. But even in our day to day lives, even in the midst of suffering, He is there with us, turning bad to good.

Consider the blind beggar. He has two things defining him, at least from what the world would see. He's blind, and he's a beggar. The world would look at that and see nothing but misery. But consider how Jesus turns them for good. His blindness turns out to be a blessing, since unlike the rest of the crowd, he isn't distracted or misled by the appearance of Jesus and His followers. He doesn't have physical eyes to get in the way of his eyes of faith. And second, as a beggar, he has very little to keep him from following Jesus. There's no successful business or political career to go back to once he's healed. He has nothing to lose and everything to gain by following Jesus.

Our Lord uses the trials we face in this life in much the same way. To human vision, human reason, they look like nothing more than misery to be avoided or stopped at any and all cost. But our Lord sends us even crosses for our blessing. How long it will be that we have to suffer under them? We don't know. What is the reason for our Lord sending them? We often don't know that either.

But just as the Lord allowed this man to lose both his sight and his earthly possessions so that He might give Him the sight of faith and treasures in heaven, the Lord will also turn your trials to good – eternal good – through faith in Him.

Follow in the footsteps of the blind beggar. Strive to see things, not as the world, or even your own eyes or reason might lead you to believe, but as our Lord Jesus speaks of them in His word. He is the true and eternal King, and He will never fail to show mercy to those who ask it of Him.

In Jesus' name, amen.