

Quinquagesima Sunday
Redeemer Lutheran Church - Milwaukee
WRIT - WFWO broadcast
Sunday, February 13, 1972

"IS THERE A WORD OF HOPE IN THE CROWD?"

Luke 18:31-42

In the Gospel text for Quinquagesima Sunday we read:

As he drew near to Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the roadside begging; and hearing a multitude going by, he inquired what this meant. They told him, "Jesus of Nazareth is passing by." And he cried, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" And those who were in front of him rebuked him, telling him to be silent; but he cried out all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" And Jesus stopped, and commanded him to be brought to him; and when he came near, he asked him, "What do you want me to do for you?" The man said, "Lord let me receive my sight." And Jesus said to him, "Receive your sight, your faith has made you well." And immediately he received his sight and followed him, glorifying God; . . .

Very few of us really know the darkness and loneliness of physical blindness. And yet every one of us has experienced in ourselves or through someone else the deeper level of blindness to which this gospel narrative alludes.

For beyond the physical handicap of the man's blindness, our story depicts a character whose whole being was smothered by darkness.

He was a beggar...thus, often laughed at or overlooked. He was a burden to others. He was probably dirty and ragged. He got in the way of others. He had become accustomed to the world walking by - if he was recognized, the words of recognition were too often slanderous and rebuking. And so his blindness was not only physical; he suffered from a condition of hopelessness-despair - isolation - rejection.

And so the miraculous nature of the text restates itself for us in this way:

We see a blind man;

a man who cannot see hope,
who cannot see joy,
who cannot see mercy or compassion.

We see this man amidst a crowd:

a crowd which is with this man,
yet does not recognize his need;
a crowd which sees and hears this man,
yet does not understand him.

We see a man reaching, grasping for a helping hand;

We see a crowd pushing him back.

We see a blind man / and a blind crowd.

The crowd simply adds to the despair--to the
hopelessness--the isolation--to the blindness of this
man.

And yet amidst this pushing, insensitive mob we per-
ceive a listening ear--

an eye of undistorted vision--
an outstretched hand--a hand which freely
extends itself to that grasping plea.

Here was offered a word of hope,
a word of recognition and acceptance,
a word of human awareness
a word of a man, a man Jesus.

And the word was one which assured the blind beggar
that he was not alone--that someone cared about him--a
word that assured him that he was heard--that he was
worth something. It was a word which gave that blind
man the power to become a whole man--a man with pur-
pose and vision and a new mission for his life.

It is the same word that Christ continually offers to
us, especially when we are feeling hopeless--despair-
ing--full of guilt--rejected.

"Receive your sight, your faith has made you
well."

You and I are accepted, forgiven, and given new vision
for life as we are offered and accept God's love--and
it is through His love that we are offered the power
to be perceptive to the world and its needs around us.

That God-given word of compassion and love is a miraculous power which enables us to see again--to see ourselves and others around us--to see that we have the power of His love and compassion to share--to see that we too can perform miracles when we are willing to share the power of His love and compassion with the hopeless--the despairing--the isolated--and the rejected--yes, with all those who are handicapped by blindness in life.

Is there a word of hope to be shared with anyone in your crowd? With the crowd at home, at school, at work, at church, with a neighbor or in a different neighborhood? Have you and I seen any blindness or hopelessness in ourselves? In the crowds we gather with? Have we offered God's compassion in that crowd by being humanly aware of another's struggle to see light again? Have we shared the power of God's love and compassion?

These are hard questions to answer because we find it so much easier to get caught up in the rush and pushing of the crowd. We're so busy getting ahead with the rest of the crowd, that we just don't have the time to hear or stop for a brother who is crying for help.

We just keep running with the crowd. And in our passion for getting ahead to that great future, we too often fail to see that we're just running in a circle--the little we accomplish in capitol gains, is the much that we lose through family separation, ulcers, frustration, and a host of other tensions. In our pursuit, we often don't take time to stop and look at our surroundings. We ignore our present. What we find there might be very interesting or even shocking, but we just don't have time. And so the disregard for our immediate environment often produces a crumbling of relationships--whether between a man and wife, or between black and white, or between parent and child, or between the many other relationships which we have become blind to.

We hear the shouts of rebellious kids, of minorities, of our wives and husbands, of our business associates, of T.V. cancer commercials, of the aged, of the prophets for peace, but like that crowd years ago, we

just keep pushing ahead and rebuking anyone along the route who stands in our way.

We do this until we again perceive the hearing and vision of that man who has become God to us even in our blindness.

For even amidst our often fruitless pushing and shoving to get ahead--even amidst our hopeless and chaotic struggles--even amidst our good days and bad, our God responds to our cries for a new vision, and through His Son says: "Receive your sight, your faith has made you well."

With that word of hope, He hopes that as we run with the crowd today and tomorrow, that we might remember his mercy and love during our blinded and hopeless moments when we have felt isolated and rejected.

For as we remember, the experience of His love and mercy to us at those moments when we felt most deserted--especially when His love and mercy have come to us through another servant of His, then in response we might just pause long enough along the crowded run to offer that same love and mercy to someone else who is crying out for new hope--for companionship--for somebody to care--for a little recognition, acceptance, and worth--yes, for new vision.

In so doing we will be sharing the miraculous power of God's love and mercy in the person of Jesus Christ, and in so sharing that power, we will be that person in the crowd who offers THE WORD OF HOPE to a world of people showing many signs of hopelessness--despair--rejection--yes, blindness to life.

"Receive your sight, your faith has made you well."

Amen.

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Milwaukee 3/4/73

"LOVE IS . . . !"

1 Corinthians 13:1-13

"I may be able to speak the language of men and even of angels, but if I have not love, my speech is no more than a noisy gong or a clanging bell. I may have the gift of inspired preaching; I may have all knowledge and understand all secrets; I may have all the faith needed to move mountains-- but if I have not love, I am nothing. I may give away everything I have, and even give up my body to be burned--but if I have not love, it does me no good.

"LOVE IS PATIENT AND KIND; LOVE IS NOT JEALOUS, OR CONCEITED, OR PROUD; LOVE IS NOT ILL-MANNERED, OR SELFISH, OR IRRITABLE; LOVE DOES NOT KEEP A RECORD OF WRONGS; LOVE IS NOT HAPPY WITH EVIL, BUT IS HAPPY WITH THE TRUTH. LOVE NEVER GIVES UP: ITS FAITH, HOPE, AND PATIENCE NEVER FAIL.

"LOVE IS ETERNAL. There are inspired messages, but they are temporary; there are gifts of speaking in strange tongues, but they will cease; there is knowledge, but it will pass. For our gifts of knowledge and inspired messages are only partial; but when what is perfect comes, then what is partial will disappear."

has been talking about
In the 12th chapter of 1st Corinthians the Apostle Paul the Body of Christ, the Church - and he has clearly set forth the fact THAT WE ARE ALL MEMBERS OF IT by virtue of our commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ. He then speaks of the various kinds of gifts and how they may be used for the benefit of one another and of the WHOLE CHURCH - and then he leads into our text for today with these words - BUT EARNESTLY DESIRE THE HIGHER GIFTS. AND I WILL SHOW YOU A STILL MORE EXCELLENT WAY -

And this is the MORE EXCELLENT WAY (Read text).

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But even as we hear these words again and again,
there is an overwhelming feeling THAT WE REALLY
DON'T UNDERSTAND WHAT PAUL WAS TALKING ABOUT!

Let me illustrate. In THE LUTHERAN this week,
a woman, mother of six children, whose husband
was killed in Vietnam four years ago, writes these
words -

IF YOU BELIEVE

that understanding is better than pugnacity
that "helping" is not the same as "doing" for
someone
that agreement sometimes has nothing to do with
thinking alike

IF YOU WILL REMEMBER

that life is a gift not only to cherish,
but to use for the common good
that all people are God's children,
including the so-called enemy

IF YOU WILL TRY

to erase resentment within your heart
to be a little more patient
a little less headstrong
right now
today

with the little things
with the person sitting next to you
with the car ahead of you
with the unknown thousands you touch daily

THEN PEACE WILL START

And my husband will not have died in vain.

She seems to have captured something of what
Paul was talking about. He was speaking of a
QUALITY OF LIFE, about relationships within the
Church, the very CEMENT which holds it together,
but also about relationships WITH ALL MEN, because
such LOVE IS NOT EXCLUSIVE but always INCLUSIVE!

And although he was speaking specifically about
GOOD WILL, and BROTHERLINESS and FRIENDSHIP, it
becomes clear that SUCH A QUALITY IN OUR LOVING
will change all relationships.

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It has been suggested that if we substitute the word CHRIST for the word LOVE all of the way through those verses, it will speak the truth to us -

CHRIST IS PATIENT AND KIND - CHRIST DOES NOT KEEP A RECORD OF WRONGS, etc., but I want to suggest that it is also true if we substitute the words, THE CHRISTIAN - because then it describes what this life is all about -

And the fact is - WE DO NOT FIND LOVE BY LOOKING FOR IT; WE FIND IT BY GIVING IT. And when we find love by loving, WE FIND GOD.

Our Lord gave us His love generously, not in order that we might be loved, BUT THAT WE MIGHT BE FREED TO LOVE ONE ANOTHER. He calls us from the childish pre-occupations with security and satisfying our own selves to OUR RESPONSIBILITY TO CARE AS MUCH FOR OTHERS AS WE CARE FOR OURSELVES - He calls us from RECEIVING to GIVING!

If someone should ask me - HOW CAN I FIND GOD? I would tell him - GO FIND SOMEONE TO LOVE AND YOU WILL FIND GOD.

OF COURSE IT ISN'T EASY, because our natural inclination is always to WANT FOR OURSELVES - but until we have learned to GIVE OF OURSELVES, we shall always be unsatisfied.

THIS IS THE LIFE TO WHICH WE HAVE BEEN CALLED - and never are we made more aware of it than we are during the Lenten season of the Church Year. For here we have the most dramatic symbol of love's courage and triumph in the cross and resurrection; it stands for the love wherewith God has loved us.

And having done this, Christ then says - LOVE ONE ANOTHER AS I HAVE LOVED YOU. And even if we have all of the gifts of intellect and insight and understanding - and the gifts of speech and

prophecy - BUT DO NOT HAVE THIS LOVE which will cause us to give of ourselves for another, IT IS ALL TO NO AVAIL.

It is this QUALITY that the Church has all too often lacked. It has sought to ^{be} pure and righteous and holy. It has fooled itself into thinking that it has attained those goals to some degree, and consequently has shut out of its fellowship all of those WHO KNOW THAT THEY CANNOT MEASURE UP.

And they see that WE REALLY DO NOT MEASURE UP EITHER, and are therefore not able to deal with our failures.

WITHIN THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE CHURCH we need to be all that the Apostle Paul describes. Of course we are imperfect - don't we confess it everytime we come to worship? DON'T WE BELIEVE IT? And if we do - then why should we sit in judgment of others, as if somehow THEIR FAILURES are GREATER than OUR FAILURES.

But within this fellowship WE ARE MOST AWARE of the aware of the fact that EVEN WHILE WE WERE LESS THAN GOD WANTED US TO BE, YET HE LOVED US AND GAVE HIMSELF FOR US, in order that we might become MORE THAN WE OTHERWISE MIGHT BE!

Having given us His love, we have it for our response to Him, so that we love Him by loving one another. And the nurturing of our response to God's love IS THE WORK OF THE CHURCH.

We are to love God by LOVING ONE ANOTHER, and in loving one another WE INTRODUCE ONE ANOTHER TO GOD. This is the work of the Church and the vocation of the People of God.

Our gift of love which accepts, understands, forgives and includes within the fellowship IS THE GREATEST GIFT WE HAVE TO OFFER - and having learned to live with it and in it within

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the fellowship of the Church, WE THEN CAN REACH OUT TO INCLUDE ALL OTHERS with whom we come in contact.

THIS IS THE MORE EXCELLENT WAY - and will make everything else we do GREATER AND MORE MEANINGFUL.

LOVE DOES NOT ASK THE QUESTIONS - am I right, - will my love be returned - am I giving more than I am getting - is it possible that IF I GIVE TOO MUCH I WILL BE HURT - or might another's love sometime fail me -

NO - LOVE IS - IT JUST IS -

It is patient and kind - it is not jealous or conceited or proud - it is not ill-mannered or selfish or irritable - it does not keep a record of wrongs - it is not happy with evil, but is happy with the truth - it never gives up -

WE KNOW THIS because we have experienced THIS KIND OF LOVE IN JESUS CHRIST, just as Paul experienced it -

And having experienced it, WE MUST SHARE IT, OR LOSE IT!

AMEN.