

“Knowledge and Passion together as Saving Faith”

Luke 18:31-43

Sermon for Quinquagesima Sunday 2022; February 27, 2022

Emmanuel Lutheran Church, Rifle, Colorado

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In the Gospel reading, Jesus takes the twelve disciples aside and tells them what is going to happen at Jerusalem to Himself. Then Jesus has an encounter with a blind man at Jericho.

When Jesus takes the disciples aside, the first thing He says is “behold.” This is like saying, “Hey, pay attention, and take note of what I am about to tell you.”

Then Jesus says to them that we are going up to Jerusalem. He has His sights set on Jerusalem. Jesus’ having his sights set on Jerusalem gets my attention in light of what Jesus says is going to happen to Him there. If you or I knew that if we went to a certain place, we would endure mocking, and horrible treatment, and being spit upon, and then flogging and death, would we go?

I suppose the answer to that would depend in large part on whether it was our calling, our duty, our responsibility to go. It was Jesus’ calling to go. So, He was looking straight ahead and told His disciples, we are going. See here we see Jesus’ courage to do what He was called to do. He becomes our courage to do likewise.

We also see Jesus here going to the danger. Going to the fight. So, we see something about God here. God does not avoid the evil, but meets it and confronts it.

Jesus also did so in a certain faith and assurance. On the third day, I will stand on my feet again, Jesus said. They will do their worst. They will mock me and ridicule me and spit upon and hand me over to the Romans. And the romans will flog me and put me to death. Evil men, full of themselves and their righteous cause—they think, will do the worst injustice ever done and put me to death; but I will stand on my feet again, alive. I will live after they have done their worst.

Jesus Himself goes forward to meet His rendezvous with destiny at Jerusalem in this resurrection faith. We too move forward in this resurrection faith, as He is now risen and lives as the promise for us that life will arise out of death, that good will triumph over evil.

Jesus has a rendezvous with destiny so to speak because He went to Jerusalem according to “everything that had been written about the Son of Man” (Luke 18:31); everything that had been written. God talked about it ahead of time through the prophets. God’s word must be fulfilled, and it will be. Jesus goes according to God’s word.

The disciples don’t get what Jesus said, at all. Luke goes out of His way to point this out. First he says that they understood nothing of these things. They understood nothing. Then he says that the gist of what Jesus was saying, the subject matter and what it meant, was hidden from them. Then he says that they did not comprehend the things Jesus said (Luke 18:34). Luke impresses upon us that they didn’t get it, at all.

Why didn’t they get it? They had assumptions about how it should be. What Jesus was saying contradicted their assumptions. God told us through the prophets and Jesus said that it was going to happen. The fact that their assumptions could compute it didn’t matter. It was going to happen anyway. Yet, they couldn’t compute it.

They were assuming that Jesus should be received and praised, not ridiculed, mocked, spit upon, and turned over to the Romans. Don’t be such a pessimist Jesus. And rising on the third day? What could that possibly mean? They probably believed theoretically in resurrection from the dead, because God’s word talked about it (Ex. 37), but really? Come on Jesus, you are not

going to die. It's not going to be that bad. People are really good at heart, you know. Our leaders really wouldn't do that to you given all the good things you have done. It is not too difficult for us to understand how they just didn't understand.

The next thing that happens is Jesus encountering the blind man on the way into Jericho.

The man was sitting beside the road begging. As Jesus was entering the town, the man heard the commotion. He thinks to himself: "Such a crowd of people entering the town certainly is unusual. I wonder what is going on." So he asks: "What is going on?" (Luke 18:36).

Some people from the crowd tell him that Jesus of Nazareth is passing by. The way they said this is significant. The name "Jesus" was a popular name among the people of Israel at the time. So if they had just used Jesus' first name alone, it may not have made much of an impact. But they said, Jesus *of Nazareth*. They knew who *this* Jesus was. It was Jesus from Nazareth. Jesus had a reputation. He was known and identified in a certain way.

Now the man's heart is suddenly filled with life and hope. Jesus of Nazareth! Oh boy. This is the opportunity of a life-time. This is an opportunity he could never have dreamed of. Jesus of Nazareth being just feet away from me. So he cries out: "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me" (Luke 18:39).

They tell him to be quiet.

But this just emboldened him to cry out all the louder. But this time he says something a little different. He says: "Son of David, have mercy on me" (Luke 18:39). The second time the blind man called to Jesus, he dropped the name "Jesus" and just called him Son of David. We are seeing the man's faith.

When he calls Jesus Son of David, he refers to Jesus by His true and proper title. He appeals to Jesus by referring to His status and His office. He is acknowledging Jesus as the Messiah, the one God had promised to be the Shepherd and Savior of Israel. He is the one whom God had promised through the prophet Isaiah would open the eyes of the blind (Isa. 35:5). And here He is. He does Jesus the greatest honor. He calls out to Him by appealing to who He is. The disciples are blind. This blind man sees.

When Jesus hears this He stops. He gives orders that the man should be brought to Him. Jesus is fully in charge here. Here is a glimpse of Jesus acting as the King He is.

And look at what this most important of all Kings, of all rulers does. He orders that this insignificant blind man, begging along the road, be brought to Him. The blind man is most important. Contrast this with the likes of Vladimir Putin who does not give a hoot about the individual person into whose lives he has brought fear, and misery, and panic, and hunger, and death.

When Jesus stopped and gave orders that the man should be brought to Him, it was like the entire universe stopped and the focus became this single human being. Bob Seger sang once upon a time, "I feel like just a number, a spoke in a great big wheel." But this is not so with Jesus. This blind man—you—are supremely important to Jesus, even as the blind man and you and all of us are gathered together in the great congregation of God's people. God in Jesus and in the Spirit can do both.

Then Jesus says the most interesting thing: "What do you want me to do for you?" He asks the man what he wants. This is not in the sense of being bothered: "Okay, what do you want?" It is in the sense of calling out the man's heartfelt desire from God? What do you want me to do?

Jesus the Savior is interacting with the man's need. He is also interacting with the man's faith. If the man did not want Jesus to do anything, then he would have had no need for Jesus. He would also not have come to Jesus, and so he would have had no faith in Jesus.

So you too come to Jesus because you have need of Him. So you too come to Jesus because you believe that He is the one who can help you. So you come to Jesus because you want to find forgiveness with God, and then strength to live God's way, and the living promise of hope in the midst of death, the power of continuing to believe when all the evidence of our experience suggests otherwise.

The man cries out to Jesus out of his deepest need by appealing to Jesus' office as Son of David. In the deepest desires of his heart, he wants Jesus' help. This too is faith.

Lord, that I might see.

Jesus says to him, "Receive your sight. Your faith has saved you" (Luke 18:42).

Your faith. This is not just a feeling or psychological state of believing something, whatever it might be. It is what he believed, which is to say, who he believed in. His faith was in Jesus, but Jesus was something specific to the man. He was the Son of David. The promises of God are wrapped up in this. What the man had heard Jesus doing in light of the promises of God in the prophets was wrapped up in this. He had heard things about Jesus. He had been taught things about the Messiah. His faith involved knowing, having knowledge.

But his faith was also about the passion of looking to Jesus for help. It was passion from the depth of his soul. Living hope that Jesus could help him. It was the trust that opens itself up to Jesus to seek from Him what He has to give.

It was both, knowledge and passion for Jesus as Savior, and the good that Jesus can bring. It was both. In the talk of today, we would say the man's faith was both head and heart. It is not one or the other, but both, together. Knowledge without the passion is just information. But passion without knowledge is just feeling and desire without guidance, without direction. It can even be passion without truth. Such passion could be in just about anything.

But it was not just anything to which the man cried out that day. It was not just anything that gave the man his sight. It was not just anything that told the man that his faith had saved him. It was Jesus of Nazareth. It was the Son of David, God's promised Messiah, whom we now know through His word in the Spirit.

In the knowledge that God's word taught him and what Jesus had actually been doing, the man came to Jesus. In the depth of his need, he came to Jesus. And so in this faith, he was saved. So Jesus gave him his sight. This faith of both knowledge and passionate trust-hope saved him because it latched him onto Jesus. And there the blind man found God *for him*.

When I use the word passion, I am not suggesting that you have to show something expressive on the outside. I am talking about our hearts crying out to Jesus in the depth of our need. God sees that in our hearts, and that is enough (1 Sam 16:7).

May we grow in knowledge while we also come to Jesus in passionate trust-hope, our hearts moved by our need and our heads informed by God's word directing us to Jesus, the Son of David, the Messiah, who walked steadfastly to Jerusalem for us. Amen.