

"Either You Get It, or..." Luke 18:31-43 Quinquagesima 2023

The grace, mercy, and peace of Christ Jesus rest upon each and every one of you this day.

As it is with life in general, so it is with life in Christ: Some people “get it,” and some people don’t, plain and simple. One look at our Gospel lesson for today, and we are confronted with both facts of life. St. Luke starts off this portion of Scripture by telling us that Jesus pulled His twelve apostles aside and spoke very clearly to them (again). “Behold, now is the time. Now we are going up to Jerusalem because everything that the Scriptures have said about the Son of Man are about to be brought to completion. The Scriptures have all declared that the Son of Man will be rejected by His own people and handed over to the Gentiles. He will be mocked and shamefully treated and spit upon. He will be flogged and finally put to death. And then He will rise to life again on the third day. This is where we’re going, and this is what’s going to happen.” And Luke tells us that not one of them understood (again). Not one of them grasped what Jesus was saying (again). They didn’t get it (again). What a bunch of thick-skulled rubes, right?

Contrast this with the blind beggar sitting alongside the road coming into Jericho. [A little background: Jesus will spend the night in Jericho at Zacchaeus’ house, and then He’ll go spend two days in

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Bethany with Mary, Martha, and Lazarus, and then it's into Jerusalem for Palm Sunday. This interaction with the blind beggar is taking place one week before Maundy Thursday.] Out of everyone in this scene, the blind beggar is the one who sees Jesus most clearly. This guy can't see a thing physically, and yet he hears Jesus approaching, and he boldly cries out, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" He gets it. I don't know if you understand just how profound this confession of faith truly is. Many people don't. What they see is an intensely spirited cry to Jesus for help. What they see is a guy who was simply begging for a handout. They see here a blind beggar seeking nothing more than a miraculous healing; that is, seeking something for himself. This guy wasn't looking for Jesus, per se. He was looking out for himself. Basically, people try to see a lot of themselves in this guy. Unfortunately, they fail to see the truth.

But he calls Jesus "Son of David." The Old Testament is FILLED with this term, and it always points to the Christ, the coming Messiah, God's salvation promise in the flesh. In the Gospels, when this term comes up even the Pharisees know it and use it properly. When Jesus asks them point-blank, "What do you think about the Christ? Whose Son is He?" they respond very matter-of-factly, "He is the Son of David." They get it. They know the Scriptures. And yet...they don't get it, do they?

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Elsewhere in the Gospels, the poor, the lame, the dying...they all recognize Jesus as the Son of David. They get it. When Jesus casts out a demon from the guy who raised a commotion at the synagogue, the townsfolk are asking one another, "Is this guy the Son of David? Only the Son of David—the Messiah—can do such things." The Pharisees hear this and IMMEDIATELY attempt to put it down. "This guy isn't the Son of David. He's working for Beelzebul!" Clearly, they don't get it.

So...what about this blind beggar? What group would you put him in? I'd say he gets it. But it goes a lot deeper than this. The ones out in front of Jesus leading the procession into town (more than likely the disciples) are the ones telling this guy to pipe down and be quiet as Jesus draws near. This isn't the Pharisees trying to shut this guy up. These are people on Jesus' side! In fact, the language that Luke uses here is very harsh. He says that these folks (with the best intentions, no doubt) were actually "rebuking" the blind guy as he cried out. That's a harsh term! This wouldn't be the first time the disciples had done such a thing. Remember: People were bringing their small children and babies to Jesus so that He could bless them, and the disciples were rebuking the parents then too. They didn't get it then, and they don't get it now.

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This guy, though, isn't deterred. He knows who is coming down that road. He doesn't care what the others think. The more he's told to be quiet, the more he cries out, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" "Have mercy...." What does this mean? What is this guy asking for exactly? money? Food? A favor? A healing? Well...he doesn't ask for anything other than what he says. He asks for mercy, plain and simple. The Greek word for mercy—*eleison*—simply means to ask a superior to be gracious and kind to one far lower and undeserving. There's nothing "transactional" about this. It's not a "tit-for-tat" or "let's make a deal." Notice, too, that I said that the cry for mercy is made by one who confesses that they are completely undeserving of anything. They know that they don't even deserve a moment of time; a glance; acknowledgment of their lowly existence. The call for mercy isn't a call to highlight the self in any way, shape, or form, but rather a plea for the grace of the superior. It's all about the superior's grace.

How often we don't get that. Life hits the fan; things don't go as planned, and we cry out with a very self-righteous indignation, "Lord, have mercy! Lord, what's the deal? Don't you know who I am? Don't you know all that I do for you? Don't you know that I've been a card-carrying Lutheran for so-o-o-o-o long? Don't you see all the good that I do and the bad stuff I stay clear of? Doesn't any of that count for anything? Have some mercy!" How often we just don't get it.

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And that's the whole point of this lesson. As we prepare to enter into the holy season of Lent; as we prepare to journey to Calvary with our Lord and Savior, I can't make you see the Truth of your sin and how your very nature is tainted with evil. I can't make you realize that this means you deserve hell itself for eternity. But...God can. God can and He does, through the hearing of His Word. That's another point so often missed in Luke's recounting of this event. That blind beggar was sitting along the road where Jesus was drawing near. The original Greek says that he was sitting and waiting along the *odou*—the Way. Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Him. St. Luke is purposefully very catechetical with these words. This blind beggar was sitting, waiting, and crying out where Jesus was. More importantly, he was sitting, waiting, and listening. He heard the Truth. He heard Christ, and he responded. He cried out to Christ.

So it is with all of us beggars who, by faith, "get it." And beggars we are, everyone of us. Little historical fact: When Martin Luther died, he had a slip of paper in his pocket that said, "Wir sind alle bettler. Das ist wahr."—"We are all beggars, this is true." It is true. He got it. We are all beggars. We come to God with nothing to offer; nothing in our hands. We come empty, seeking His grace and mercy, and God does just that, filling our hearts, our minds, and our souls with His rich grace,

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peace, and Life. He fills us with His body and His blood; His Word and promise.

That Word of God—Law and Gospel—works. It works miracles; miracles of death and life. It penetrates the darkness of sin. It penetrates the blindness, the deafness, the apathy, the lifelessness, and it gives life! The blind are made to see. The ears of the deaf are opened to hear. The lame walk, and the dead are resurrected to new life. Folks: This is your reality right now! God is at work in this same life-giving Word right now. And when the eyes and ears of faith are enlivened and opened; when the body of sin is repentantly mortified and Old Adam is daily drowned in the God's promise of Baptismal grace, the new man arises and emerges, leaping like the deer, anxious and ready and willing to give thanks to God for all His undeserved goodness and grace. When the baptized child of God recognizes the amazing and undeserved grace already shown to them in Christ, without their having to first ask or beg or first do their part in order to impress God and earn His favor; when this justified grace is rightly and faithfully recognized for the amazing gift that it is, the rest of life that follows—the sanctified life—is also rightly seen for what it is: a privilege and opportunity to serve and thank God by serving the neighbor and faithfully bear our crosses and make the joy and peace of Christ known through our cross-bearing and neighbor-serving.

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Folks: Here is Christ. Here is the one and only Way. Here is the fount, source, and terminus of all goodness, grace, love, and peace. Here is God, right where He's promised to be—with you always and with you right now, bestowing on you His full measure of merciful charity ["love," e.g., 1 Cor 13]; merciful charity that walked that way of the cross that no one else could, walking that way for you, making full and complete payment for you with the sacrifice of His body and blood on the altar of His cross. It is finished, once and for all, and He comes to you today with that same victorious body and blood. Blessed is He that comes in the name of the Lord! Either you get it or you don't. Those who have ears to hear, hear! Hear and cry out in thanks and praise, for your Lord has answered your prayers before you even asked. He has had mercy on you, in Christ, through Christ, and because of Christ. Amen.