

## Quinquagesima , A ✠ D 2010

### Luke 18:31-43

*In the Name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.*

1 What is love? The love the world seeks is an emotion, and it is almost always self-serving. Those who have today's Epistle reading read at their weddings will be sorely disappointed. "Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends." If you hear that with an expectation that this is how your spouse will love you, you will be shocked to learn the person you married is not very good at living this kind of love. If you hear St. Paul's exhortation as a to-do list for yourself, you will be similarly disappointed to discover your inability to embody this kind of love.

2 As St. Paul describes it, love is not an emotion, not a fleeting feeling. Love, rather, is a Person. He is patient and kind, does not envy or boast, is not arrogant or rude, does not insist on His own way, is not irritable or resentful, does not rejoice at wrongdoing, rejoices with the truth, as He is the truth. God is Love, to be sure. And Jesus, God in the flesh, is Love in the flesh. Paul's description of love is not the kind of love that comes from you, but the kind of Love that comes to you.

3 Jesus is not an abstract kind of love. He is Love perfectly and specifically. He doesn't love generically as you do, but specifically and intentionally. For the third and final time in Luke's account of the Gospel, Jesus depicts the true nature of His love. "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." It's hard to be more specific about His coming arrest, beating, crucifixion and resurrection. And yet, the disciples understood none of these things.

4 Seeing, you do not see. You want to use the love of God as a license and excuse to sin. God is loving and accommodating you suppose, even to those who worship a different, non-Triune god. He will excuse those who have no faith, as long as they live lives of love, the world muses. None of that is true. It's all nonsense. God is not that kind of milquetoast love. That's fake love. That God is love the world wants to believe. That He is specific love, no one wants to believe. A specific love that commands your obedience isn't the kind of love the world wants. A love that refuses to leave you to your old life of sin and death isn't what most people assume when they cite that God is love. A love so specific that He can declare "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father except through me" seems almost loveless to a culture that has no understanding of what love is. Repent. You'll never know what love is apart from the specific love from God. This is how we know what love is, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. With a view of love that's so distorted and focused on what meets your needs, is it any wonder that it is puzzling—even offensive—to hear that the Love of God is tied to suffering and death?

5 Love is specific and has a purpose. His destination is Jerusalem. And as He was journeying toward Jerusalem, a blind man was sitting by the roadside begging. Hearing a crowd, he asked what all the commotion was about. When they told Bartimaeus "Jesus of Nazareth is passing by," he cried out, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me." And when the

crowd rebuked him and told him to be quiet, he cried out all the more. Bartimaeus knows what love is, or rather, he knows who Love is. "Have mercy on me!"

6 Blind Bartimaeus is an icon of a Christian. He is blind and a beggar. As such, he is utterly dependant on the charity of others. In a culture that values hard labor, a blind man will find no gainful employment. Everything he has he gets only from the charity of others. His reason should lead Bartimaeus to conclude that God does not care about him. He has, after all, been blind all these years. Logic and common sense would have him give up hope in God a long time ago. And yet, he clings to the promises of God. He has heard that the Messiah, the promised Son of David, would come to show mercy to His people, to bring the full forgiveness of their sins. And when he hears that Jesus of Nazareth is passing by, Bartimaeus' faith sees what his eyes cannot. So he prays the Kyrie, "Lord, have mercy." This is what the Christian life looks like. You do no work, can do no good work, to merit the Lord's mercy. You are a beggar, possessing nothing, deserving nothing. Logic and reason would tell you to give up trusting in the promises God has made to you. The wicked seem to prosper. And yet, every Sunday the Church teaches you to pray with this blind beggar, "Lord have mercy. Christ, have mercy. Lord, have mercy."

7 And He has. On the way to Jerusalem, on His way to the cross, on His way to His death and the fulfillment of His mission, Jesus stopped. He commanded that this blind beggar be brought to Him. He cannot even get to Jesus on his own; he must be brought. Bartimaeus makes no pretensions. His petition, "Lord, have mercy," is that of all the beggars outside the city, except that he knows to whom it is addressed: Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me. He calls Him by His messianic title, and in so doing, Bartimaeus displays his faith. Faith makes no pretensions, knows it deserves nothing, trusts completely that the Lord's mercy endures forever. So Jesus had mercy on him.

8 That's the Love of God: Jesus who came to be merciful. This is what the Love of God is about. Love for the unloveable, for the unloving, for you. The Righteous one becoming the sin of the unrighteous. The death of Jesus on the cross to deliver the Love of God to you. The Love of God in the flesh, Jesus, the Son of David, has had mercy on you, too. He had you brought to Himself in the waters of Holy Baptism. Through the hearing of His Word, He has delivered to you the same faith delivered to Bartimaeus, the same faith that saves. You are set free from the hopeless pursuit of self-centered love you once craved. You have been given a completely selfless Love, a Love that loved you precisely because you didn't deserve it.

9 With the eyes of faith wide open, you remain in the company of beggars and blindmen, saints alive and saints departed, all the unloving and unloveables who like you have had their prayer "Lord, have mercy" answered. Mercy is what He loves to do. Mercy is why God who is Love took human flesh. Mercy is what the Lord continues to lavish upon you every time He gathers you around the mercy seat of His altar. Here, the Love of God incarnate feeds you with Himself. He has placed you into His love, and now He feeds you with His love, with His own Body and Blood.

*In the Name of the Father and of the ☩ Son and of the Holy Spirit.*

Pastor Jeff Hemmer