

Sermon – Luke 18:31-43; 1 Corinthians 13 :1-13
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Grace Lutheran Church
Bach Cantata Vespers – Quinquagesima
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“A Love That Bears All Things”

Sisters and brothers in Christ, grace be unto you and peace in the name God the Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

1. I would guess that the last time you heard 1 Corinthians 13 read in worship was at a wedding or, if not, that you at least associate Paul’s chapter about love with weddings. Couples often choose to have this passage read. I think this is due partly to tradition; they hear it at other weddings and so think they should choose it for their own. Don’t get me wrong; it’s an appropriate choice, just not for the reason starry-eyed young couples think. There, in their finery, they imagine that Paul is writing about *their* wonderful love. They have come to a moment of great transition in their lives and they look hopefully to the future, as well they should. But it’s probably a good thing that people don’t know just how challenging marriage will be. If they did, they might not do it! After all, the grind of daily life can feel grey after a sunny honeymoon. As we hear in the marriage liturgy, “because of sin, our age-old rebellion, the gladness of marriage can be overcast.” Indeed. I don’t imagine that my wife would describe my love as *not* being irritable or arrogant. Of course, those of us who have been married for a while have figured out that, as it turns out, married life is actually better than we imagined all those years ago – not because everything is sunshine and rainbows, but because you’ve walked through the difficult times together. Along the way, you might have even discovered that Paul was *not* writing about human love. Not primarily, anyway. Paul was writing about the love of God at work in Jesus Christ; the

- love of Christ that carries us when our love runs out; the love that bears, believes, hopes, and endures all things.
2. Paired with Paul's love chapter today is a reading from Luke. Jesus and his disciples are at the start of a life-changing journey of another sort. They are on their way to Jerusalem. This, however, is no pleasure cruise and Jesus does not mince words when describing what will happen. This is Jesus' third and most detailed prediction of his passion and death. Little is left to the imagination: handed over to the Gentiles he will be mocked, insulted, spat upon, flogged, and killed. Jesus goes on to mention that on the third day he'll rise again, but no doubt the disciples had lost the capacity to listen by that point. What did you say, Jesus? You'll rise again? Utter nonsense. Dead people are good at really just one thing: staying dead. For precisely that reason, death is to be avoided at all costs and for as long as possible. Go to Jerusalem, Jesus? No, thank you. Not if *that's* why you're going there.
 3. The disciples, you see, are blind to what Jesus is doing. So, of course, it takes a blind person to see the truth of it all. Wouldn't you know, Jesus finds one near Jericho. Hearing that Jesus is coming, the blind man sees the royal Son of David's line, and sees in him new hope. "Have mercy!" And what does Jesus do? He has mercy. He stood still, Luke tells us, although you could read the Greek as "Jesus took his stand." Jesus takes his stand to show that God has mercy on those who suffer at the margins. Jesus takes his stand to show that he acts in and with the very power of God. Jesus takes his stand to affirm that he is indeed the Son of David, the long-expected King. The blind man could already see Jesus in a way that the disciples could not. Jesus now heals the man's physical sight so that he can see what happens next.
 4. See? Jesus is preparing to climb what today's cantata calls the "monstrous mountain, which my sins reveal." The disciples, like us, are inveterate theologians of glory. They cannot grasp the reality of what must be done.

Jesus insists on doing it anyway and invites a blind man to be his witness. The disciples hear of the ugliness of the suffering that is coming, and they recoil in terror. But in faith, the blind man sees in Jesus the salvation of the world. As St. Cyril of Alexandria preached, “The word was light to him that was blind, because it was the word of him who is the true Light.”

5. Jesus, the light of the world, knows that this world can be saved only by fully entering into our darkness and death. The destruction of sin and death needs to be an inside job. So Jesus gives himself up to our sin and suffers the death that is rightly ours. And that is why Jesus wants to open our eyes. He wants us to stop pretending that it's not that bad, that we can make it on our own. He wants us to see what we need, and that's a King of David's own line whose throne is the cross of Calvary, whose crown is bejeweled with thorns. As Alan Culpepper writes, the “capacity to absorb hostility is one of the secrets of God's redemptive work.” Jesus does not suffer a gruesome death on the cross because God's anger demands that so much blood be wrung from human flesh. Rather, Jesus suffers a gruesome death on a cross in order to show us just how far God will go when it comes to forgiveness, how boundless is God's grace. It's as if God were saying, “See? Look, there, upon my Son. Sacrificed, suffering, dying. Dead. This is the worst you can do. And I forgive you even this. I forgive you even this.” Three days later, Jesus will rise from the tomb. Not with vengeance, but with peace. In this most violent act of crucifixion, violence meets its end. Sin is met with forgiveness. Death is met with life.
6. As it does for the blind man and, eventually, the disciples, this simple fact transforms us. In a world that still demands blood for blood, that still inflicts suffering as a response to suffering, Jesus creates a new path. As those who follow Jesus, we live in a new way. We, like Christ, can absorb suffering and hostility – not because the suffering itself is redemptive, but because our response to it serves God's redemptive purposes. When we live non-

violently, we reduce violence, for not only do we add violence; we also witness to the violent that there is a better way: The way of love. Here we discover the meaning of Paul's words. It is Christ Jesus who bears and endures all things, the worst of all things, so that in faith we can hope and believe all things. Living in the light of Jesus, we can bring light to this world, opening the eyes of those blinded by sin; by prejudice, hate, and greed.

7. But before we talk further about what we might do, we stop. Look! See? Jesus is going on a journey. He goes to Jerusalem. He goes to the cross. He does so for you and for me. Look and believe. For believing is seeing. What the world calls ugly is the most beautiful sight you'll see: Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the King of Heaven, suffering there for you and for me. Look in faith upon Christ crucified and receive new sight. And looking, now listen. No noisy gongs or clanging cymbals here, but a song of pure joy sung to Jesus whose passion is the pasture of our souls. It sounds almost like a wedding. Which, of course, it is. The wedding feast of the Lamb who was slain for the sake of the world. Come; receive your sight and see. Amen.

And now may the peace that passes all human understanding keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus, now and forever. Amen.