

A Blind Man Learns to See

Sermon on Estomihi Sunday

Luke 18:31–42



³¹And taking the twelve, he said to them, “See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished. ³²For he will be delivered over to the Gentiles and will be mocked and shamefully treated and spit upon. ³³And after flogging him, they will kill him, and on the third day he will rise.” ³⁴But they understood none of these things. This saying was hidden from them, and they did not grasp what was said. ³⁵As he drew near to Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the roadside begging. ³⁶And hearing a crowd going by, he inquired what this meant. ³⁷They told him, “Jesus of Nazareth is passing by.” ³⁸And he cried out, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” ³⁹And those who were in front rebuked him, telling him to be silent. But he cried out all the more, “Son of David, have mercy on me!” ⁴⁰And Jesus stopped and commanded him to be brought to him. And when he came near, he asked him, ⁴¹“What do you want me to do for you?” He said, “Lord, let me recover my sight.” ⁴²And Jesus said to him, “Recover your sight; your faith has made you well.”

The journey to Jerusalem was no walk in the park. Jesus and his disciples had an arduous and dangerous route ahead of them. They had to travel through the Jordan Valley, a scorching, inhospitable area where the heat weighed heavily on the pilgrims, and highwaymen lurked in the ravines. But the disciples were in good spirits! Finally, Jesus would come to Jerusalem. Finally, He would set the record straight. They were convinced that the capital, the temple, the center of power: That was where Jesus would establish His kingdom. They could already see the triumph before them.

However, something happened that set off alarm bells in every single disciple. Jesus called the Twelve aside. He sought a private conversation, away from the crowd. In such moments, it was always difficult to understand Jesus. So it was to be this time also. Jesus began the conversation by summarizing the excited mood: “Look, we’re going to Jerusalem!” But then He turned everything upside down. Instead of a triumphal procession and the final elimination of Jesus’ enemies, Jesus began to present a topsy-turvy world. Instead of entering Jerusalem in glory, Jesus would be mocked, crucified, and killed by the Jews.

The disciples looked at Jesus, and then at each other. Who would disagree with Jesus? Who would convince Jesus not to take this path? Was it even worth following Jesus anymore if His path led to such a bitter death? What was the point of being a following of Jesus if everything would end in disaster? The disciples looked at each other, and then at the ground. From now on, their steps and thoughts were heavy. Gone was the enthusiasm. Everyone was preoccupied and didn’t know anything anymore.

These thoughts were so heavy for the disciples that the road to Jericho flew by. Perhaps that was also the reason why some of the disciples did not hear the blind man crying out by the roadside. Others heard him quite well, but by then their nerves were so frayed that they gruffly ordered him to stop crying out. The situation only escalated, because the blind man seemed to cry out even louder.

The drama of this scene can hardly be exaggerated. On the one hand, there were Jesus' closest friends, who had just been severely disappointed by their Lord. They were His followers, yet they were blind and could not understand the path Jesus was taking. They had lost hope in Him. Next to them on the other hand was this physically blind man who, unlike the disciples, placed all his hope in Jesus and did not want to stop calling for help.

The situation is dramatic—dramatic because Jesus really is the savior of the world and really can help, but not in the way the disciples had imagined. This healing of the blind man probably happened at exactly the right moment. Just as the disciples were despairing of Jesus, this healing shows that Jesus is the Healer and Savior even on this path of suffering.

That is what He does. Jesus stops the whole group, which was heading straight for Jerusalem, and takes time for this blind man. Yes, He really takes time. Although it is obvious what the man wants, He still asks him, "What do you want me to do for you?" All the heaviness of the journey to Jerusalem and all the confused thoughts of the disciples are pushed aside in this intimate moment. The blind man expressed all his need: "Lord, that I may see!" Jesus said to him, "Receive your sight! Your faith has made you well."

Then the whole group continued on to Jerusalem, but the mood had abruptly changed. The blind man who had been healed was praising God and running ahead of everyone. Many joined him. The disciples' mourning party had suddenly turned into a party atmosphere again.

Let's take a step back for a moment. We, too, are followers of Jesus. If we are honest, we struggle with Jesus' path to the cross just as much as the disciples did at that time. We have a problem with suffering in the world in general, especially when such suffering affects us personally. Suffering clouds our eyes. Above all, we cannot see the future. It is not uncommon for us to forget how to pray and be unable to understand God.

A blind man by the roadside shows us the way to follow Jesus. If I understand medical professionals correctly, eyesight is connected to the brain in a special way, so that not only must the physical eyes be healed, but also the brain of a person who has been blind must get used to the signal. The brain must learn to see, so to speak.

When the blind man by the roadside is healed, he receives a double healing: his eyes are healed and he learns to see. He doesn't only learn to see the physical things in his environment. The first person he sees is Jesus. By seeing Jesus, he gains a very clear vision. "Your faith has made you well!" says Jesus. In that moment, this one man had clear vision, whereas even the sad and confused disciples could no longer follow or had even learned to see wrongly. They had become so fixated on the Jesus who would march victoriously into Jerusalem that they no longer saw the real Jesus as He was foretold in Scripture. In this way, they were very selective in their vision and needed visual aids repeatedly to understand Jesus' path.

This week we begin Lent. We will go with Jesus to Jerusalem. But we too need visual aids so that we can recognize Jesus again. Sometimes I am very afraid that a pandemic of spiritual blindness has struck us Christians in particular. Not only that, but we have also lost our hearing. We have opened our eyes and ears, not for Jesus, but for completely different things. This makes us blind and deaf: Blind and deaf to human relationships, to the miracle that God wants a relationship with us, and the constant call of the Gospel.

Surely this blindness applies to all of us. Somehow, we are all afflicted with blindness and need visual aids. We need someone to open our eyes so that we can recognize God's image in ourselves and others again, to truly see the world and life with all its wonders, and so that we can understand where the path is leading us.

But now it is time for us to talk about Jesus Himself again. Jesus says, "Let us go to Jerusalem!" Today, too, He calls us to the season of Lent. Let us go with Jesus to Jerusalem. Let us be His followers! Jesus is the only one who sees everything. He knows that His path on this earth cannot and must not bypass the cup of suffering. Even Satan repeatedly tries to tempt Him to avoid this path. Just like the disciples of that time, we disciples of today do not understand why Jesus had to do this. Our vision is too short-sighted. We can recognize neither our deepest need nor our Savior. That is why we so often run after all kinds of people who promise us salvation.

Jesus wants more than that. He wants us not only to be healed of physical torment or a bitter fate, but He wants us to be freed from sin and to inherit eternal life. That is why He follows the path to Jerusalem.

Jesus takes us along on this journey. Even today, Jesus is with His Church. He understands perfectly well that we understand so little of what makes us whole. Yet He is there. He was with the doubting disciples, but He was also with the man who was healed of his blindness. He asks, "What do you want me to do for you?"

Faith comes only through the presence of Jesus Himself. Without Jesus, the blind man cannot believe. Only when Jesus stands before him, speaks to him, and says "See! Your faith has made you well!" does he become a follower of Jesus.

The road to Jerusalem was no walk in the park. The inner journey that the disciples took to follow Jesus was impossible. From our perspective, there is no goal and no hope. We cannot see Jesus, nor understand Him, nor believe in Him. Without Jesus, there is no following Jesus! It's that simple.

When Jesus enters the picture, when Jesus speaks to us, when He addresses our illness, and when He gives us faith in the first place—when all this happens, faith is not difficult at all. Then, like the blind man, we follow the path to Jerusalem, glorifying God! Amen.