

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

With Jesus, it is certainly a topsy-turvy world. In the last two weeks, we have witnessed a man who, by all human measures was surely blessed, walk away from Jesus disheartened, while today we see a man, whom we would surely call needy, be commended for his faith and follow after Jesus.

Yes, you'll recall — and for the sake of our guests today — a man came up to Jesus. The man was interested in inheriting eternal life ... a pious desire. And Jesus did not reject him; Jesus loved him and called him to discipleship: “*go, sell all that you have and give to the poor,*” Jesus said to him, “*and come, follow me*” (Mark 10:21). But he couldn't do it ... because he had great possessions, great wealth. He rejected Jesus; Jesus didn't reject him.

That's the way it is for God and His Son. He rejects neither the Jew nor the Greek, neither the rich nor the poor, neither male nor female, but wants us all in His kingdom under the banner of Christ. That's why the Father sent His Son Jesus — to be the savior of the world, not just of some.

That's all over the place in the Scripture. The Christmas angel told the shepherds, “*I bring you good news of great joy that will be FOR ALL THE PEOPLE. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord*” (Luke 2:10-11). John the Baptist says of Jesus that He is “*the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin OF THE WORLD*” (John 1:29). Jesus tells us: “*God so loved THE WORLD, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life*” (John 3:16). Paul tells us: “*God our Savior ... desires ALL PEOPLE to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth,*” which is why He sent His own Son, “*the man Christ Jesus*” to be the “*one mediator between God and men*” (1 Tim. 2:3-5). John also writes: “*Jesus Christ the righteous ... is the [atoning sacrifice] for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world*” (1 John 2:1-2). Our Epistle says that Jesus “*did this once for all when he offered up himself*” — once for all people, of all times and all places, once because His was the perfect sacrifice of the spotless Lamb of God.

But man often rejects God's grace and especially His grace manifest in His Son Jesus Christ. Like that rich man, people are choosing other gods over Christ. They choose their identity as man or woman, black or white, gay or straight, over their identity in Christ. All of this is crass idolatry. Of the rich, Jesus said to the disciples, “*How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!*” “*It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God*” (Mark 10:23, 25). But He could have just as well said it about any of these other idols. In fact, He did more generically say: “*how difficult it is to enter the kingdom of God!*” For when it comes to salvation,

*“With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God”* (Mark 10:24, 27).

Jesus encountered another man this week, a man with none of the advantages of the rich man. Far from being rich, this man was a beggar. Far from thinking himself capable to enter the kingdom of God, this man was blind and was not capable even of taking care of himself. He had to rely on others. He could only cry out for mercy!

This man, the son of Timaeus, was sitting alongside the road near the ancient city of Jericho. He heard that Jesus was walking by and cried out to Him: *“Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”*

Jesus’ reputation had surely preceded Him. Why else cry out to Jesus in this way? Because of who Jesus had shown Himself to be, for this is how the prophet foretold *“They shall see the glory of the LORD, the majesty of our God. ... Say to those who have an anxious heart, ‘Be strong; fear not! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God. He will come and save you.’ Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy”* (Isa. 35:2, 4-6).

So Jesus had done. He had cast out the unclean spirits, healed many who were sick, cleansed the leprous. He had caused the paralytic to walk again and had healed a man with a withered hand. He had opened the ears of the deaf and the eyes of the blind. He had cast out a mute spirit, loosing the tongue of the afflicted boy. He had raised the dead.

Blind Bartimaeus likely knew the Lord’s promises that far from being excluded from God’s grace, the Lord had promised to include the lowly in His kingdom: *“Behold, I will bring them from the north country and gather them from the farthest parts of the earth, among them the blind and the lame, the pregnant woman and she who is in labor, together; a great company, they shall return here. With weeping they shall come, and with pleas for mercy I will lead them back.”*

Rebukes to keep silent and stop bothering the teacher weren’t going to stop him. He shouted all the louder, *“Son of David, have mercy on me!”*

Jesus heard his pleas for mercy. He stopped and, again, far from rejecting the blind beggar, Jesus called Bartimaeus to Him. *“What do you want me to do for you?”* *“I want to see again.”* And Jesus did for blind Bartimaeus as he desired — it was done for him as he believed. *“Immediately,”* Bartimaeus *“recovered his sight”* — he could see again. Jesus showed Himself to be the Lord, the God who came to heal and save.

But the story doesn't stop there, for unlike the rich man who rejected Jesus, now "seeing Bartimaeus" did not. Jesus told him, "*Go your way; your faith has made you well.*" But Bartimaeus did not go away; he followed after Jesus. He had come to believe in Jesus. He had become one of Jesus' disciples.

Indeed, Bartimaeus presents to us a picture of true discipleship, for it is not about being rich and powerful as the prosperity preachers proclaim. Look not to your wealth as evidence of true discipleship. It is not about your identity in various groups — not political or racial or ethnic or sexual. True discipleship is not found there either. True discipleship means that you identify as Christian without regard for all these other human distinctions.

True discipleship means seeing yourselves as you are before God: lowly, blind, needy — beggars, as Luther had written on a note before he died, "We are beggars; this is true" (LW54:476) — beggars dependent upon the Lord for His mercy. True discipleship means gladly receiving all the goodness that the Lord gives to us, whatever that might be — it is surely faith, but perhaps it's also health ... or not; perhaps it's wealth ... or not; perhaps it's a loving mom and dad ... or perhaps it's just one; whatever it is, receive it with thanksgiving, and then follow the Lord on His way by His Word, "*a lamp to [your] feet and a light to [your] path*" (Psalm 119:105).

That Word tells us how those on this path of true discipleship act. Paul says, "*Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality*" (Rom. 12:9-13). There's a lot more there, but Paul concludes this section this way: "*Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good*" (Rom. 12:21).

Lord, grant us this discipleship. Help us to follow in Jesus' way and keep us there as He leads us through this topsy-turvy world to eternal life.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.