

Rappahannock Christian Church – 4/3/11
Dr. Kenneth Wilbur

Communion Meditation

Jesus said that when we come to his table we are to "remember me." Part of what this means, of course, is that the elements of bread and cup remind us of Christ's suffering and death. Another part of it, though, has to do with us. As we remember Christ's passion we must also remember his prediction that suffering would also await his most faithful followers. "Is a servant greater than his master?" he asked. "If I have been rejected and been made to suffer, how can you think that it will be better or easier for you?" I was reminded of this very thing in Mr. Lankford's Sunday School class this morning, looking at the cruel imprisonment of the Apostle Paul -after a lifetime of faithful service to the Lord Christ! No, if we are faithful to speak and to act in Christ's name, and in his Spirit, trouble may very well come our way. But that doesn't matter. We are called to be faithful witnesses.

This morning as we obey Christ's command do "remember me" let us remember not only his own suffering, but that he calls us to faithful service -no matter what.

I Corinthians 11:23-26 - The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

"Was Blind, but Now I See"

John 9:13-38 - They brought to the Pharisees the man who had been blind. Now the day on which Jesus had made the mud and opened the man's eyes was a Sabbath. Therefore the Pharisees also asked him how he had received his sight. "He put mud on my eyes," the man replied, "and I washed, and now I see."

Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath."

But others asked, "How can a sinner perform such signs?" So they were divided.

Then they turned again to the blind man, "What have you to say about him? It was your eyes he opened."

The man replied, "He is a prophet."

They still did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they sent for the man's parents. "Is this your son?" they asked. "Is this the one you say was born blind? How is it that now he can see?"

"We know he is our son," the parents answered, "and we know he was born blind. But how he can see now, or who opened his eyes, we don't know. Ask him. He is of age; he will speak for himself." His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders, who already had decided that anyone who acknowledged that Jesus was the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. That was why his parents said, "He is of age; ask him."

A second time they summoned the man who had been blind. "Give glory to God by telling the truth," they said. "We know this man is a sinner."

He replied, "Whether he is a sinner or not, I don't know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!"

Then they asked him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?"

He answered, "I have told you already and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples too?"

Then they hurled insults at him and said, "You are this fellow's disciple! We are disciples of Moses! We know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this fellow, we don't even know where he comes from."

The man answered, "Now that is remarkable! You don't know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly person who does his will. Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing."

To this they replied, "You were steeped in sin at birth; how dare you lecture us!" And they threw him out.

Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?"

"Who is he, sir?" the man asked. "Tell me so that I may believe in him."

Jesus said, "You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you."

Then the man said, "Lord, I believe," and he worshiped him.

I am sure you recognize the sermon title -a quotation from the beloved hymn, "Amazing Grace," by John Newton. "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me! I once was lost, but now am found, was blind, but now I see." As you probably know, John Newton was a pretty bad man. He had lived an immoral life. He was even the captain of a slave ship for a time. But he was converted to Christianity, which changed his life completely. He had experienced the amazing grace of God.

I wonder if, perhaps, John Newton had this very story of the healing of the blind man by Jesus in mind when wrote the hymn.

This is a long story. The actual healing itself takes up only a verse or two, and the rest, it seems to me, is about the characters in the story.

Of course, Jesus is one of those characters. "No one," the people say in amazement, "has ever seen anything like THIS! No one has ever heard of someone healing a man BORN blind! How can this Jesus NOT be from God?" The healing, therefore, legitimizes Jesus in the eyes of many. He is one to be heeded when he speaks! He surely represents God, brings the truth of God! The blind man, in response to questions put to him by the Pharisees, says that Jesus is a prophet. Later in the story Jesus identifies himself as the Son of Man, and the blind man worships him.

The account also zeroes in on the Pharisees. They realize that Jesus has done something extraordinary in this healing. Their reaction, however, is to try to intimidate people, to make

them deny that Jesus is from God. They refuse to even consider that Jesus might be the Messiah. On the contrary! Jesus' healing of the man on Sabbath day is, they insist, further proof AGAINST him! He has done "work" on the Sabbath! He doesn't abide by their rules.

The story is also about the blind man himself. He is drawn into this huge controversy simply because he happened to be the man Jesus healed. He didn't come on the scene to argue with the Pharisees or to debate them. He would surely not have been able, on theological or biblical grounds, to confirm or refute either the claims of Jesus and his supporters that he was sent from God or the claims of the Pharisees that Jesus is of the devil. All he can do is to testify to his own experience: *"I don't know how he did it, I don't know where he is from. I can't answer your questions. These are matters beyond my understanding, and certainly beyond my authority to answer. All I know is that I was blind, and now I see, and that God worked this miracle through the one called Jesus."*

I believe that the blind man represents all of us who have encountered Jesus. Yes, some of us can even attest to miracles of literal healing. This week at the Lenten Service Steve Livingston, the Pastor of the Center Cross Church of God, who fell off the roof of his church a year ago, stood before us all and recounted the miracle of his healing. What a dramatic and inspiring story! Most of us, though, do not have stories like that to tell. We can, though, testify to the power of God to heal us *spiritually*. We have caught a glimpse of a holy God, and have realized, to our horror, how stained and sinful we are. By ourselves we are without hope. We are powerless to cleanse ourselves and make ourselves fit to be included in God's Kingdom. But we have also been told the good news that God is merciful! Jesus' love for us is so complete, so strong, that he was willing to die to save us from our sins! We have experienced the joy of salvation. We have peace with God. We belong to a loving Christian community. We have been stunned by God's love, perhaps even brought to tears!

So, tell me -do you know WHY God loves you so much? *You do not!!!* Tell me, how could Jesus, the divine Son of God, have become a man? And I wish you would explain the resurrection of Christ to me. How did that happen? By what mechanism? And, how is the Holy Spirit able to intervene, to quicken us, make us alive in Christ???? You can't answer these questions any more than I can! Just like the blind man -all we know is that we have experienced God's healing touch. We were broken, and God made us whole!

There is a chorus that expresses this simply and plainly. It's called, "It Took A Miracle"

*It took a miracle to put the stars in place;
It took a miracle to hang the world in space.
But when He saved my soul,
Cleansed and made me whole,
It took a miracle of love and grace!*

Benediction

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen. – Ephesians 3:20-21