

Luke 16.19-31  
First Sunday after Trinity  
3 June 2018  
St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church, Topeka, Kansas

+ INI +

Beloved in the Lord: grace be unto you and peace from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.  
Amen.

This is how it goes:

*Pastor, please hear my confession and pronounce forgiveness in order to fulfill God's will.*

*Proceed.*

*I, a poor sinner, plead guilty before God of all sins. I have lived as if God did not matter and as if I mattered most. My Lord's name I have not honored as I should; my worship and prayers have faltered. I have not let His love have its way with me, and so my love for others has failed. There are those whom I have hurt, and those whom I have failed to help.*

The opening salvo of the Private Confession. You can find it on page 292 and look at it after the sermon.

But today, we can use those words to bring the Gospel into focus.

For here we have a rich man. He dresses in Giorgio Armani. He eats only the best food. His house is amazing. You know the guy.

Not because he's your neighbor. But because he's you.

He's the you of your own creation. He's the you of your unbelief. He's the you that knows there's a death-sentence hanging over your head just as sure as you were born, and that if he's gonna have any good—at all!—then *he* must get it. *He* must amass it. *He* must enjoy it. He's the you who lives as if God did not matter, but as if you mattered most.

\*\*\*\*\*

You know, one of the mistakes people make in reading the Gospel according to St. Luke is reading it too flat. They don't understand that Luke's way of talking—and here, Jesus' way of talking—is to expose inner realities by pointing to outward things. Outwardly, all we see is a rich man. A rich man who lives the life of Riley.

But we dare not suppose that it's his wealth that's the problem. It's not. It's his heart. For Abraham was rich and blessed with many physical gifts. David, too, was rich, blessed with incredible bravery and administrative skill. His son Solomon even richer—and just as wise as a serpent! For their riches and success and wisdom, they are never condemned.

But this rich man in the story Jesus is telling today *is* condemned. Why? Well, certainly not for his riches. But for where he has placed his heart. For he has lived as if God did not matter and as if he mattered most.

And all of that is made apparent by what he does. Lazarus lies outside his door. Malnourished to the point that even his wounds can't heal. And poor Lazarus must be cared for. He has been made the opportunity the Lord has literally plopped on the rich man's door step. The Lord would use *him—the rich man*—as His mask and richly lavish His grace and mercy and care on Lazarus through. Just as you are called to do for your own neighbor with the means the Lord has given you.

But the rich man refuses.

“I have not let His love have its way with me, and so my love for others has failed...There are those whom I have hurt, and those whom I have failed to help.”

And just to show that the Lord doesn't need the rich man's works, but his neighbor, the good Lord puts the mask the rich man refuses to wear on the neighborhood dogs. And they take care of him. They lick poor Lazarus' wounds. For the Lord always provides all that we need to support this body and life.

But why? Why does the rich man refuse to help? Well, we might say it's a lack of empathy. We might say it's because he's turned a blind eye to the poor. And both of those would be true.... As far as they go. He's calloused. He's cold. Oh, to be sure, he covers it up pretty well. He surrounds himself with all the trappings of a life that say, “Me and God? We're good!”

But underneath the subterfuge and underneath his calloused coldness to Lazarus is the thing Jesus wants us to see: for the rich man lacks faith.

He lacks faith that what the Scriptures say about heaven and hell are true. And he finds out he was dead wrong.

He lacks faith that what the Scriptures say about the wickedness of his heart is true. And he wields that self-delusion with deadly consequences for his own neighbor.

But more importantly, he lacks faith in what the Scriptures say about everything that God does to save him from his disaster of a life:

That He sent His only-begotten Son into the flesh, to be made sin for him, that he might be made the righteousness of God in Christ.

That whereas in the coldness of his heart he neglects the need of his neighbor, Jesus has perfectly loved—by healing the lame and sick, by giving sight to the blind, movement to the paralyzed, life to the dead.

That where there was nothing he could do to bridge the gulf between Himself and holy God, Christ had already done it. In His life. In His death. In His resurrection.

That the fires of hell are quenched not on *that side*, but on *this side*, through the water of holy Baptism.

That while a drop of water on *that side* would be like heaven, on *this side* the Lord gives not water, but wine that is His blood and bread that is His body. For the forgiveness of all sins. And with it life and salvation.

The tragedy of this story that Jesus tells isn't Lazarus' demise. It's the rich man's unbelief. That's the linchpin of the entire thing. And it lays its finger on the heart of every one of us, who must be forced to confess: "I have lived as if God did not matter, and as if I mattered most."

In the face of that, what is to be done?

For that answer, we must look to Lazarus. Again. Remember. This whole story hinges on faith and unbelief. Which is to say: the whole story hinges on THE WORD.

So...why does Lazarus end up in heaven in the bosom of Abraham? It's because he's the opposite of the rich man. Outwardly, that's obvious. Where the rich man has great food, Lazarus has none. Where the rich man has a wonderful home, Lazarus is homeless. Where the rich man has access to medical care, Lazarus has nothing but dogs and maggots.

But it is not for this set of oppositions that Lazarus is blest—as if there were some virtue in poverty, just as there's no virtue in wealth.

No. Remember. Outward picture and inner reality. Lazarus is a beggar. The outward beggar a picture of the spiritual beggar. As we all are.

That's what faith is. Spiritual beggary. It comes empty-handed. It comes broken. It comes beleaguered by sin and death. It looks at its own coldness of heart and despairs of itself—but not of God's mercy. It looks at the unbelief that lives in the heart right next to faith. And it cries out to Him who is the source and author and creator and giver of faith and says, "I believe! Help Thou my unbelief!" If only it can hear the Word of Moses and the Prophets, the comforting Words of the Holy Scriptures and the firm promises of God in Christ!

Thirsty and hungry for righteousness it runs to where righteousness is found and given. An alien righteousness, a firm righteousness, a righteousness that can't falter or fail, because it's not mine, a sinner's, but Christ's. And its thirst is slaked and its hunger sated by the righteous blood of Jesus and His holy body.

And seeking cover from the flames of eternal torment, it plunges itself back into the waters of Holy Baptism, where those flames are forever doused, and where heaven, not hell, is opened and given.

That's what faith does. It listens. It listens to God's holy and life-giving Word and Gospel. Proclaimed from the pulpit. Read from the Scriptures and your devotion book. Connected to water, bread, and wine taken at the command of Christ Himself.

That's *your* "Moses and the Prophets." Same as poor Lazarus had.

Of course, the rich man, he had it figured differently. For him it was not listening, but seeing: "Send someone back from the dead!" he asks Abraham.

Which means that for him it was not faith but sight; not promise, but promise realized.

But not Lazarus. By *faith* and *faith alone* Lazarus had everything and more than the rich man had by sight: all the treasures of heaven and eternal bliss. Even in the midst of the greatest suffering.

And why was that? It's because he listened. It's because he had Moses and the Prophets, the same Moses and the Prophets who testified of Christ and gave him Christ.

Nor has anything changed today. Your faith can be made alive and nourished by nothing else than God's holy Word. Read. Preached. Sung. And connected to bread, wine, and water. Nothing else—whether career or leisure, house or lifestyle, riches or success—can do it. Faith and hope anchored there this parable calls unbelief.

But faith that is anchored in Moses and the Prophets—the Word alone? That the parable calls. salvation.

The Lord grant you all such faith for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

*pax dei, etc.*

*sdg*  
*jsb*