

1<sup>st</sup> Sunday after Trinity—June 11, 2023

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

In the Gospel reading today Jesus tells the story of the rich man and Lazarus. He's teaching you two things in this reading. The first is that your life in Christ is to be lived in love toward your neighbor and he does this with the rich man by showing you what not to do. The rich man lived his life with no care for his neighbor and completely the opposite of the Epistle reading which says, "We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother." The rich man didn't love his neighbor, Lazarus. He was content with feasting in his home while Lazarus lay at his door starving and the dogs licking his sores.

Now something of note in this reading is that Lazarus was laid at his door. Jesus didn't talk about someone distant from the rich man or place a burden on him with some societal injustice, or whatever the term is now. No, this man, Lazarus, a person was near the rich man and was in need. Rather than living according to the 5<sup>th</sup> Commandment to help his neighbor in his physical need, the rich man didn't care, he didn't help him, he didn't love him whom he could see and thus did not love God whom he can't see. The rich man hated God.

God is teaching you in that to love your neighbor as yourself. He's doing this not in an abstract way but with real people. You know who they are, you can see their faces, you wave to them when they go by, and perhaps you know their names. The Collect of the Day is your prayer as you think about all of this, "O God, the strength of all who trust in You, mercifully accept our prayers; and because through the weakness of our mortal nature we can do no good thing, grant us Your grace to keep Your commandments that we may please You in both will and deed."

That's what God teaches you about your life this world toward your neighbor and it's a fruit of your faith. Loving your neighbor as yourself can only flow from a true living faith in Christ that God has given. Simply telling the rich man to love his neighbor would only go so far. He might outwardly have done more to help Lazarus either out of compulsion, guilt, or maybe he would have cared for him or had some type of pity. But truly loving him and performing this good work of taking care of his neighbor can only proceed from faith. "For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin" Romans 14 says, and Hebrews 11 says, "without faith it is impossible to please him [God]."

This, then, gets to the heart of the matter and really the eternally serious thing in this reading today. The rich man lacked faith. He didn't listen and trust God's word and it led to his eternal condemnation. That's a very harsh warning that God teaches all of you this morning as you listen to this reading. It's a timely warning too for you all to hear today because this is a very common error that is prevalent in our world especially among younger generations, like my own.

There are many people who want to help others and serve them and for that we are thankful. Now, another discussion needs to happen about what is truly good and right in terms of helping people and what love is or isn't. There's a great deal that goes by "love" today that is far from loving and, in fact, a mockery of real, godly, and biblical love. Some things that go by the name "love" is a cover up for evil and harms people even unto eternal condemnation and death. In Psalm 16 God says, "The highway of the upright turns aside from evil; whoever guards his way preserves his life. Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall." And again, in Psalm 31 God says, "The Lord preserves the faithful but abundantly repays the one who acts in pride."

Going back to the issue at hand in this gospel reading, though, there was a man in need. The desire to help others is good, at least in a worldly or civil sense. Many of my "millennial" generation value this idea of seeing people in need and helping them however possible. What happens, though, is this becomes a substitute for the

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Christian faith. Rather than hearing the word of God, helping the neighbor becomes the source and comfort in one's life. I've personally had people tell me this with something like "I love God by volunteering and sacrificing my time to help people, I don't need to sit and listen or read what God says in the Bible. My faith is personal, and my faith is in the here and now with people in this world who need help."

Some of the most dangerous lies of the devil are not blatant lies but ones which contain elements of the truth. Statements and sentiments like this about loving the neighbor have some truth in them. I mean, look at the Epistle reading today, "If anyone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother." That's all true, absolutely. But this is not at the expense of or to be the source of what redeems you.

In the Old Testament reading Moses recorded about Abram something very important. "And he [Abram] believed the Lord, and he [the Lord] counted it to him [Abram] as righteousness." The only righteousness that avails or counts before God is the righteousness of faith. The reason why this is the case is because faith receives, lays hold of Jesus and his obedience and righteousness for you. You have peace with God through faith. As much as someone may love his neighbor and do great and wonderful things in this world without faith in Christ he will end up in hell. Salvation by works doesn't always look like the Pharisees, often, it looks a lot like nice people doing nice things for one another.

So what? Both situations and ditches are wrong. The rich man didn't love his neighbor, Lazarus. That is wrong and really was a fruit of unbelief. On the flip side of that, though, are those who will do things and show "love" (although using that term here needs to be qualified) for their neighbor and yet have no righteousness. Both of those situations and lives are sinful and a warning to you.

Listen, then, to what was said to the rich man in the Gospel reading, "And he [the rich man] said, 'Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father's house—for I have five brothers—so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment.' But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.' And he said, 'No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' He said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.'" It was too late for the rich man. Now he wanted his brothers to be warned. Abraham, father Abraham, gave him some fatherly advice and wisdom here. The brothers have the word of God, they have everything they need, listen to it.

So, what does this word say to you? Love your neighbor. There's no wiggling around this, God commands you to love your neighbor. He also teaches you what love, real love, is and what this love for your neighbor will look like in the various stations of your life in the church, your family, and in the world. This is where God's law teaches you as a Christian. You listen and learn from the 10 Commandments. You see what God teaches in the Epistles about your conduct in this life. You look to God to define what love is and what love is look like in your life. The Father said about Jesus, "this is my beloved Son, listen to him."

Look and examine your life closely according to God's commandments. Listen to the word of God and take it to heart. Look hard at your life and examine it closely. Ask yourself this question, "is there anything in my life that I am loving in a way like the rich man? Go through the Ten Commandments and compare your life to them. Am I living a life that knows I am heading toward death, or I am just living my life my own way, on my own terms. Or to put it in the statement of Abraham, "I have God's word, am I listening to it or finding every excuse to not hear it, put it on the back burner, or not conform my life to it?"

It's always telling and a marker of this when you stop and start thinking about what God says to you. When your honest with yourself and you realize what it is you are treasuring in this life and what you are putting all

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your time and effort or even what you are fearing into you see that you need to repent. Just look at your past week or month and count the number of times you sat down and read the Scriptures but can't begin even count the number of hours you have devoted to things like sporting events, television shows, or even your work when it has come to define your life then you are in danger of being like the rich man. So too when you have God's word and yet you want to be arrogant, prideful, and stubborn enough to remain in sin or think you know better than God and what he teaches you then you also need to repent. You have Moses and the Prophets, listen to them. Repent.

Your old sinful man wants to be the one in control. He not only wants to come up with his own ideas about how your life should be lived but he wants to be the one defining the terms like "love," or any number of others under attack today. Rather than simply throwing up your hands and saying "you live your life and I will live mine" as a Christian, listen to Moses and the Prophets. Heed that fatherly wisdom from Abraham. Listen to the word of God. Hear this word, love it, and live it out in your life. Confess the Christian faith to your family and friends and always be prepared to give a reason for the hope and confidence you have in Christ. Always confess and teach the truth being faithful to God's word. This is the culture God cultivates and uses you in your families, friends, and the world around you to bring about real change and you know what this all is? There's a big theological term, "love." It's out of love for each other and the love you give to those around you who have been placed at your gate. See what God teaches and you where you have sinned, repent lest you too perish and end up in the same fate as the rich man. Tell your old man to be silent and let God's word speak in your life to teach you to love your neighbor and what this love, which is real love, is to look like in your life. And, especially, don't find your confidence in yourself and this fruit but find your confidence and comfort in God's love for you in Christ.

That's the real comfort today for you dear saints of God as you sit here and listen to Jesus. He's the one who has loved his Father perfectly and completely even to the point of taking your sin upon himself and dying for you and this means the Father, your heavenly Father, loves you. Christ's love is laying down his life and taking it up again so that you would have a place at the side of Abraham and not in the torment of hell where you deserve because of your sin. Instead, he goes in your place suffering God's wrath and into the grave. Your sin is forgiven, and you are covered with the righteous life, obedience, death, and resurrection of Jesus. You are baptized and you have eternal life. You are a son of God and have the boldness and invitation to call God your "dear Father."

Take this to heart dear children of God. The Lord looks at you this very day and says, "you are righteous in my sight." With this declaration you know that you will be where Lazarus went and is even now. He had Moses and the Prophets and so do you. God has spoken to you and your eyes are fixed on Jesus, your Savior. Your life is hidden in Jesus and now you walk through this world as one who knows you have a future glory to come and looks at your neighbor with a love that flows from the love of Jesus for you. You go through this life seeing your neighbor as one for whom Christ has died just as he died for you. Your heart belongs to Christ and this heart is a new heart that overflows with mercy toward your neighbor. It's a heart that treasures God's word as the words of life and the lamp to your feet and the light to your path. Your prayer each day is for God's protection and care even as you with all boldness call him your dear Father for in Christ you are his dear children.

So, with all of that behold your Lord and behold the new life you have in him. Be steadfast and immovable in this faith God has given to you by his grace alone. There's nothing in this world more precious to you than Christ and even if heaven itself were empty it would be enough to be with Jesus. Sorrow cannot break your heart because your trust is in the Lord who made heaven and earth. Your body and soul have been given to you by your Lord and he has redeemed you by his blood. Your whole being belongs to Jesus and lives in faith toward him and in love toward your neighbor for that is who God has recreated you in those baptismal waters to be as a Christian. Trusting his word and letting it speak you are not swayed by any false doctrine for that

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profanes the name of Christ. Satan has no power over you because he has been defeated. In patience and endurance you bear your crosses and follow where Jesus leads.

Fixing your eyes on Christ you have a new life and a life that lives knowing and living with a gaze toward the horizon where you see your grave to be sure, but it stands open and empty as the Lord stands over it and having lifted you out of your grave. Your life is lived preparing for death, but you face it with the promise of the resurrection from the dead. You go through this life seeing the things of this world as temporal and you are stewards of the possessions you have. When your neighbor is in need, when he has been placed at your gate, you help him as you can, and you point him to the same hope you have in Christ. And as you think about death your life is lived in view of your Lord's death and resurrection. You cling to the promises that because he lives so shall you and just as he is risen from the dead you too shall rise from your graves and live with him and his saints in the new creation he will create. Whenever that day may come, or if the Lord returns first, you die well a Christian death which is a death that has life.

That's all your life in Christ and your Christian hope in this life even amid death and what a joy it is indeed to pray this and know the Lord does and will answer your prayer. "Lord, let at last Thine angels come, To Abr'ham's bosom bear me home, That I may die unfearing; And in its narrow chamber keep My body safe in peaceful sleep Until Thy reappearing. And then from death awaken me, That these mine eyes with joy may see, O Son of God, Thy glorious face, My Savior and my fount of grace. Lord Jesus Christ, my prayer attend, my prayer attend, And I will praise Thee without end."

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.