

First Sunday after Trinity, Sunday, June 11, 2023

Readings: Genesis 15:1–6, 1 John 4:16–21, Luke 16:19–31

Faith Trusts in Christ for Life Eternal

When the beggar Lazarus died, he was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom. For he was truly Abraham's seed. Like Abraham, he believed in the Lord, and the Lord "*counted it to him as righteousness*" (Gen. 15:6). The name Lazarus means "*God is my help.*" The unnamed rich man, on the other hand, did not love and trust in God. For he evidently cared little for the beggar at his gate. And "*he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen*" (1 John 4:20). He who loved and trusted in possessions and prestige died and was in torments in Hades (Luke 16:19–31). Repentance and faith are worked only through Moses and the prophets—that is, the Word of God, for it points us to Christ. Only through His death and resurrection are we brought the comfort of life everlasting.

Sermon Transcript:

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

So we have a very familiar story with Lazarus and the rich man and if you take away who goes where, so take away the idea that Lazarus goes to heaven and the rich man goes to hell, just think about it, which person would you rather be? The rich man or Lazarus in this world? Just in this world? I mean, if we're honest with ourselves, we'd rather be the rich man than we would Lazarus. I mean, Lazarus does not have a lot going for him. He's a beggar. He's got sores all over his body. He wishes he could eat the crumbs. He probably doesn't get a good meal very often. The dogs are licking his sores as if they're the only ones that are caring for him. That's not exactly the life goal for most of us to be in that position.

And yet if we listen to this story, Lazarus is the one that we pray that we are like. Part of the clue comes in the name Lazarus. Lazarus means God helps me. God helps. That is what the name literally means. God is our helper. Now, interestingly enough, Eliezer, which we hear about in the Old Testament, Eliezer is the same word. It's a derivative of the same word, God helps us. I don't know if it means anything, but it's very interesting to see that connection. God helps us. Now, Eliezer was not to be the heir, the one through whom God's promise was given, but Eliezer and Lazarus, both of them received the benefits of that heir, the promise of God's presence in their lives. Now, what do we get from all this? When Jesus is speaking this parable, He's trying to communicate we are called to listen to the Word of God and to allow the Word of God to be our only hope and comfort.

Now, the rich man was looking for his own health and well-being throughout his entire life. Now, this is not to say that being rich is evil and guaranteed to send you to hell. That's not what we're saying here. It is saying, if that's your focus, if that's where you put your security, then you might have an issue. See, Luther kind of caught onto this point in telling us that we are all beggars before God. Spiritually, we have nothing to offer. The only thing that we have to offer God is our sin, our rebellion, our failure to live up to His commands. And God says, "Well, that's enough. I'm going to give you My Son and I'm going to take all of that from you." What a glorious thing that is. But we know that from the Word of God, we know that God is love and He loves us. He sent His Son to die for us and His love abides in us, as John says, "By this is love perfected with us." God's love is perfected with us in the fact that He abides with us.

See, this is why perfect love casts out all fear. We are filled with the presence of God. In our baptism, God came to dwell with us. In our baptism, God called us by name as His children. God knows us as His children. He knows the hairs on our head, i.e. He knows everything about us and He still loves us, in spite of that. He loves us because He has chosen to love us. He has chosen us and called us and so we are perfected through His

presence. And therefore we have confidence on the day of judgment. I don't know about you, but initially, when I hear about standing before the judgment seat of God, it doesn't exactly give me a warm, fuzzy feeling. I mean, anytime you go before a judge and you're like, "Okay, and what's the outcome here?" I don't think that's a comforting place to be, and yet we have confidence.

And we will be facing the judgment seat. God is going to judge us. That is a fact. But we rejoice for that day. We look forward to that day as Christians because we know the judgment of God is not guilty. We know the judgment of God is go and receive your rest, well done good and faithful servant because you believed in My Son and I counted it for your righteousness. God gives us everything and all we do is trust that His Word is true. That's it. We believe God when He says this is what's going to happen. And that was a problem with the rich man and with a lot of people. A lot of times we want to see miracles. Even us, we'd love to see the act of God when we're going through hard times and difficult times. Sometimes we wish for a sign, if something would just happen, then we would be at peace. But God calls us to be at peace even when there is no sign, even when everything seems to be going wrong, even when we're struggling, even when we're debilitated.

Even when we look around the world and all we see is chaos and evil, we are still called to be at peace. We're still called to trust Him because His Word is sufficient for our salvation. What does He say to the rich man? Even if someone would rise from the dead, they still wouldn't believe. We know who has risen from the dead. We know that He is the heir of Abraham, the promised child of Abraham, who is coming to bring all of us to salvation. And we know that through His love we can face the judgment day without fear. But we also need to understand and know that because He loves us, we are called to love our neighbor. Every single neighbor, including the ones we don't like, including the ones we disagree with, including the ones that are sinners. We are called to love our brothers. This is what we are put on earth to do because He has loved us.

Now, this does not mean that we roll over and don't say that sin is sin. But we walk alongside our neighbors, our brothers, and people that we come in contact with because they are loved by God as well. God loves all of us and they have the same value to God as we do. And so we are called to remember the great things that God has done, the marvelous and amazing things that he has done. And we are called to listen to His Word and be seeped in His Word so that we might then share that Word with others. That is the love of God, that is the love of neighbor that we're talking about, about walking alongside them, praying for them, helping them in their time of need, comforting them in their sorrow as we have been comforted by God. This is what it means to love God. See, the Ten Commandments are kind of split into two sections. The first three commandments are all about God, and the last seven are all about our relationship with each other.

Our relationship with each other means absolutely nothing unless we understand the first ones, our relationship with God. And the first one, you should have no other gods. We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things. See, if we fear God then we don't fear illness, sickness, loss of job, loss of career, a war, famine, pestilence, illness, sickness, whatever, we don't fear anything because we fear God and we know that He will take care of us. And so to have no other gods means to walk in faith no matter what, even if we end up like Lazarus. It's a little bit hard to accept but the reality is Lazarus was loved by God. He didn't get a whole lot in this world except the one most important thing, and that is faith. And think about this, how many times have you gone through a difficult time in your life and seen how God has been faithful through it? How many times have you learned more about God in the difficult times than you have in the easy times? The difficult times are where we learn how much God can do. The difficult times are where we learn how God is faithful, especially when it comes to the very end of life.

I don't know how many times I've been along the bedside of someone who is a Christian and who is facing their deaths. And there is a peace, a peace that surpasses all understanding because they know that they are going to be where Lazarus is, in the bosom of Abraham, as we learned in the King James. The bosom of Abraham, it's the image of a place of comfort, a place of peace. Whenever we're scared as a kid, something frightens us, what do we do? We run to our parents' bed and we snuggle up to them because that's where we

find safety and security. The same image is true right now. When we are afraid, where do we go? We run and we snuggle up to the protection of the loving arms of our God and Savior.

It's a symbol of His presence in our life, of the comfort that we have, no matter what. So we trust Him and we call upon Him in every trouble. We pray, praise, and give thanks. And we listen to His Word where He teaches us, He grows us and He strengthens us. So, as we think about our life, those of us who have lived an extended portion of our life know that it's not an easy course of study. It's ups and downs and lefts and rights, and who knows what's. And yet through it all, our God is with us and His Word is true. Now, He said it to Abram, "Look at the stars, number them if you can. That is how many descendants you will have, how many offspring." And you and I are part of that number. You and I are part of that number that cannot be counted because God's Word is faithful. He promised Abraham that He would make his offspring so huge and we are the result of the fulfillment of that Word. God continues to fulfill His Word each and every day. He loves us and He cares for us. And therefore, His love casts out all fear. His love comforts us, and we can stand firm no matter what because He has claimed us as His child and we are His.

May His grace, His mercy, and His peace be and abide with you always, now and forevermore, unto life everlasting. Amen.