

The First Sunday after Trinity | St. Luke 16:19-31  
June 18, 2017 | Saude & Jerico Lutheran Churches

**In Nomine Iesu**

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Lord God, heavenly Father, in mercy You have established the Christian home among us: We beseech You so to rule and direct our hearts, that we may be good examples to children and those subject to us, and not offend them by word or deed, but faithfully teach them to love Your Church and hear Your blessed Word. Give them Your Spirit and grace, that this seed may bring forth good fruit, so that our homelife may advance Your glory, honor and praise, our own improvement and welfare, and give offense to no one; through the same, Your beloved Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one true God, now and forever. Amen. (ELH p. 149)

*Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. (Rom. 1:7, etc.)*

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*The sermon text for this morning is taken from the sixteenth chapter of the Gospel according to St. Luke. We read selected verses in Jesus' name:*

[Jesus said:] "There was a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. And at his gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table. Moreover, even the dogs came and licked his sores. / "The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried, and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. And he called out, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame.' / "But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us.' / "And he 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.'" (ESV)

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*These are Your words, heavenly Father. Sanctify us by Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen. (Jn. 17:17)*

In Christ Jesus, who reconciled us with God the Father through His own death and resurrection (Rom. 5:10), dear fellow redeemed:

Father's Day is a national holiday of relatively recent origin. It was resisted for a time on the grounds that it would become too commercialized (which of course it has been). But since Mother's Day had already been adopted, it seemed only right to have a Father's Day too. And it certainly is appropriate to celebrate fatherhood, whether or not a day for fathers officially shows up on the federal calendar.

Numerous social studies have concluded that children who grow up without fathers are much more likely to struggle in school, make bad decisions, and engage in unhealthy activities. Children need both the nurturing of mothers and the discipline and instruction of fathers. It is strange, then, that fathers are given so little respect in our society. They are depicted in many sitcoms and movies as bumbling fools trying to get by with as little work as possible, unless it involves improving their “man caves.” Mom is the one who picks up the slack and bails out the family with her common sense. Of course, there are exceptions to this. But the bar for fathers does not seem to be set very high.

And many men are happy to play along. They pursue women, not for the purposes of marriage and family, but for self-satisfaction. If a child should happen to be conceived on a one-night-stand, their first thought is how they can get out of any responsibility. If they cannot deny what happened, or coax the mother to abort, they begrudgingly pay child support. This behavior is so common that it is all but accepted. It does not surprise people and maybe doesn't even bother them to hear that a professional athlete might have eight children, all with different mothers. What strikes people as strange and even concerning is when a public figure has eight children with one wife (see Philip Rivers).

The only way to understand fatherhood, and to reclaim it as it was intended, is to go back to the source of fatherhood, which is God the Father Himself.

## I

God has always been a Father, even from eternity. And He has always been the Father of God the Son, who is eternally begotten of Him. That means fatherhood is inherently important. It is something to be taken seriously. And what does God the Father do? He is described in the Bible as the Creator (Gen. 1:1), who works for the benefit of others. He is the Provider (Mt. 5:45), who continues to give both to the grateful and the greedy. And He makes sacrifices, even giving up His own Son for the salvation of sinners (Jn. 3:16). Already we recognize responsibilities that God has given to fathers. They are called to work, to provide, and to sacrifice for the good of others.

But that is not all. The primary responsibility God has given to fathers is that they teach His Word to their families. Ephesians 6:4 says as much, *“Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.”* Psalm 78 describes the responsibility in more detail. The psalmist, speaking for God's people, promises that we will *“tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the LORD, and his might, and the wonders that he has done. He established a testimony in Jacob and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers to teach to their children, that the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn, and arise and tell them to their children, so that they should set their hope in God and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments; and that they should not be like their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation, a generation whose heart was not steadfast, whose spirit was not faithful to God”* (vv. 4-8).

The truth of God is passed down from generation to generation, as many of you here can testify. How far back in your family tree can you find Christians? Perhaps as far back as you have family records. But the heritage of Christian teaching goes back even further. It stretches back to Adam, who believed God's promise of a Savior after falling into sin. But because of the fall, he

is remembered as the father of sin rather than the father of the faithful. God gave that distinction to Abraham. He said to him, *"Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations.... I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make you into nations, and kings shall come from you. And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you"* (Gen. 17:4,6-7).

The LORD was especially referring to Abraham's spiritual descendants. The Apostle Paul writes of Abraham that *"his offspring"* includes both the Jews and the Gentiles, whoever *"shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all"* (Rom. 4:16). Later he says, *"not all are children of Abraham because they are his [natural] offspring.... [B]ut the children of the promise are counted as offspring"* (9:7,8). When the soul of the beggar Lazarus was taken to heaven by the angels, he was brought to the side of his spiritual father Abraham. He went to heaven because he believed God's promise of a Savior, just like Abraham did (Gen. 15:6). And there, Lazarus was comforted.

The rich man, on the other hand, died, and his soul was sent to hell. He went to hell because he rejected God's promise. Still, he tried to identify himself as one of Abraham's offspring. *"Father Abraham,"* he called out, *"have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame"* (v. 24). But there could be no mercy for him. So he turned his attention to his brothers. *"I beg you, father,"* he said, *"to send [Lazarus] 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"* (v. 27-28). Abraham replied that only one thing could change their hearts: *"They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them"* (v. 29).

## II

As this passage shows, the rich man and his five brothers were Israelites, blood descendants of Abraham. They had access to *"Moses and the Prophets,"* which refers to the Old Testament Scriptures. And yet none of them took God's Word seriously. What does that tell you about their father? It is very likely that he raised children to succeed in the world, but failed to teach them what was really needed. So we have here **A Tale of Two Fathers**: father Abraham, whose offspring are those who believe God's promises, and the father of the rich man who raised worldly offspring.

The tone a father sets is generally what his family will follow, whether good or bad. God wants men to be positive spiritual leaders in their homes. Statistics show that when fathers are disinterested in spiritual matters or delinquent in church attendance, their children are very likely to fall into the same patterns. But what about when fathers are unbelievers or absent? In cases like these, mothers have no choice but to be the spiritual leaders in their household, and God promises to bless their humble efforts.

The enemy every Christian home faces is the devil, whom Jesus calls *"the father of lies"* (Jn. 8:44). The devil wants to destroy the Christian family, and he focuses his temptations on the father first of all. If he cannot coax the father to deny Jesus, he works on the mother, and then the children. Sadly, he often succeeds as we see in our own families and among our friends.

Our heavenly Father recognizes what anguish all of this causes us. He sees the fatherless struggling to chart a good course in the world. He understands the pain of a mother deserted by her child's father. He knows the pain of parents, who pray day and night for God's mercy upon their wayward children. No one here was raised by a perfect earthly father. But we do have a perfect Father in heaven, and He knows how to bring healing to the wounded and comfort to the grieving. No person on earth is beyond His capacity to help.

It was for every relationship, every home, every family torn apart by the devil, that God the Father sent His Son. He was born not in the natural way, of man, but of woman only, in whom He was conceived by the Holy Spirit. This gives women as much honor in their station as men have in theirs. Jesus increased in wisdom and stature (Lk. 2:52), but not in sin. He did exactly what God commands everyone to do. He did not fail like you and I so often do. He honored His mother Mary and guardian Joseph and perfectly followed His heavenly Father's will. And He did that for you.

However you have disrespected and dishonored your father—as all children have—, Jesus credits you with His perfect obedience by faith. He went to the cross to blot out your sins of stubbornness and rebellion, and God remembers them no more. And however you have failed in your responsibilities as a father—as all fathers have—, the Lord forgives those sins and equips you to step up today and try harder. If you lead your children to “Moses and the Prophets,” God will not fail to bless your work. Then you will be giving them riches that no one will take from them. These riches of the Gospel are for every sinner, for you, to cover over all the ways you have fallen short in your various callings to show love to your neighbors. Your Father forgives those short-comings for Christ's sake.

The greatest legacy that fathers and mothers, grandfathers and grandmothers, aunts and uncles, brothers and sisters, sons and daughters, cousins and friends, can leave, is the saving Gospel of Jesus. Only that gives hope for a better future. Only that endures to eternity. Because only through Jesus and what He has done to save you, can you be sure that you will be carried by the angels to the side of father Abraham. With him and all the faithful, you will eternally worship the “*God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all*” (Eph. 4:6).

*Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, forevermore. Amen.*

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