

The First Sunday after Trinity

St. Luke 16:19-31: "We Have More Than Meets the Eye."

June 5/6, 2021 | Saude, Jerico, & Redeemer Lutheran Churches

In Nomine Iesu

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Lord Jesus, waken us to seriousness concerning our souls, and teach us to [gladly hear and learn Your Word of grace]. Help the rich to do good and to gather for themselves treasures in heaven, and help the poor to suffer patiently like Lazarus. Lord, save us from unbelief, and give us a blessed end. Amen. (Laache, *Book of Family Prayer*, pp. 399-400)

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

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

[Jesus said to the Pharisees:] "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)

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

In Christ Jesus, who in mercy brings down the mighty from their thrones and exalts those of humble estate, who fills the hungry with good things and sends the rich away empty (Luk. 1:52-53), dear fellow redeemed:

In some places, you would hardly go a day without seeing a homeless person. In our communities, you might not see one in a calendar year. When you do happen to see one, what is your gut reaction? Is it disgust? Compassion? Curiosity? You probably find it hard to imagine how the person got to be in that situation. Isn't there some family member or friend who could help them? Couldn't they just get a job?

The solution to homelessness is hardly ever so simple. We can't tell by looking at them what is in their past, what difficulties they might have experienced. Their homelessness might be self-inflicted due to poor choices they have made or even from laziness. Or they may be victims of circumstances outside of their control, like terrible mistreatment by others or serious mental illness.

From the information we have about Lazarus, we don't know how he became a beggar. It could very well have been a mixture of wrongs done by others along with poor choices he had made. When we are introduced to him, he had already lost everything – a home, personal possessions, and good health.

We can picture him, skin and bones, dressed in rags, flies buzzing around, Lazarus groaning, hardly able to lift his face or an empty hand, dogs sniffing him and licking his sores. The best that he could hope for, the thing that filled his thoughts every day, was the possibility of table scraps. The rich man didn't need those, Lazarus wouldn't be any trouble, just let him have a little of what was heading for the landfill.

The status and appearance of the rich man was exactly the opposite. He was healthy, lots of meat on his bones, clothed in purple and fine linen, more than enough food, plenty of friends and admirers, thoughts filled with parties and pleasures. People wanted to know him. They wanted his attention. They wanted to be *like him*. He was the guy you hoped to see at a fundraiser, the guy you wanted on the board of directors. The rich man mattered. The beggar did not matter.

But then something happened, something that put the beggar and the rich man on exactly the same level. That something does not care if a person is homeless or lives in a mansion, if he has mere pennies or millions of dollars. That something is death. No one can escape it. No amount of money can buy one's way out of it. Lazarus might have died sooner than the rich man, but both of them died.

Some people might hear this and say, "It is true that death comes to everyone, but as long as we are here, we would rather live rich than poor!" So their whole focus in this life is gathering and growing, more things, nicer things, fun and games, parties and pleasures. Jesus told a parable about this, about a rich farmer who was so successful that he decided to do nothing but "*relax, eat, drink, be merry*" (Luk. 12:19). He did not give thanks to God. He did not think about the needs of his neighbor. He thought only about himself. And God said, "*Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?*" (v. 20).

If we live only for the riches of this life, we might look impressive to the people around us – they might know our name –, but we really have nothing, nothing that matters. This is the central thought in today's text. Everything is backward from how it appears. The wealthy one wasn't really the rich man, it was Lazarus. The rich man appeared to have it all but lost everything he valued. The beggar appeared to have nothing but gained greater riches than this world can comprehend.

What was it that reversed their fortunes so completely? The difference was faith. Lazarus believed that even though he had nothing, even though he suffered, God still loved him and

would take him to heaven by His grace. The rich man had no time for God, or if he mentioned God, it was only lip-service. He may have talked about “being blessed,” and “having God smile upon him,” but he really thought he was the master of his own success. He had everything he wanted – what more could he need from God?

The rich man was actually a beggar, but he didn’t know it. This is the fatal error that so many still make today. We are all beggars – all of us rich and poor, powerful and weak – every single one of us is a nobody and we have nothing apart from the merciful Lord. We need the spiritual gifts that only God can give us. And He wants to give them – He is eager to give them. How does He give them? It’s through “*Moses and the Prophets*.”

“*Moses and the Prophets*” is a shorthand way of talking about the entire Old Testament. The New Testament hadn’t been written down yet, so “*Moses and the Prophets*” referred to the whole of the inspired Word of God that the people had access to. That means they had the Law of God which revealed their sinfulness. And they had the clear promise of salvation through the Messiah, the Lamb of God who would take away the sin of the world.

Through this powerful Word, the Holy Spirit worked repentance and faith. He opened people’s eyes to recognize how far they had fallen away from God, and also to see His ongoing love and compassion toward them. This is how Lazarus came to possess everything spiritually though he had nothing physically. Whatever the reasons for his homelessness, he repented of his sins and trusted in his Savior. His stomach was empty, but his heart was full, full of faith, full of hope, full of love.

He had more than meets the eye. And the same is true for you. You may not have much that catches people’s attention. You might not wear the latest styles of clothing or have a very nice house. You may not be well-known or well-respected. Your best might never seem good enough. The fact is, you are just a temporary inhabitant of this world. You will come and go, and sooner or later your name will be forgotten.

The world will forget your name, but God does not. Ancient history books have no record of the beggar Lazarus whom we hear about in today’s Gospel reading, but God knew him. His name was recorded in the Book of Life. So is yours. Your name is written there because the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ, poured out His blood to pay for your sins.

Your spiritual poverty was no one’s fault but your own. And Jesus took all your sins on Himself, all your filthy rags of unrighteousness, and He suffered and died in your place. Like Lazarus, He was put outside the gate. He was covered in painful wounds, bleeding, naked, nothing to satisfy His thirst, surrounded by dogs (Psa. 22:16), no one showing mercy. He did that for you, so that you would have a seat at the Master’s table, clothed in brilliant attire, eating and drinking to your heart’s content.

Jesus completely reversed your fortunes. You deserve what the rich man ended up with – eternal torment in hell. Instead you have what Lazarus received – life in the holy name of Jesus. You were dressed in the rags of your own works that could not hide your sins. Now through Holy Baptism, you are clothed in the garments of Jesus’ righteousness. You were hungry for forgiveness and peace with God, unable to come into His presence. Now through Holy

Communion, Jesus comes to you and gives you His own holy body and cleansing blood for the remission of your sins.

You, my fellow beggars, are rich—rich beyond compare! You have everything you need for eternal life in heaven. But what if you don't feel rich? What if the weight of the bad things you have done keeps getting heavier and heavier? What if you can't shake the burden of guilt over the pain you have caused, the people you have hurt? What if your sins are more than meets the eye, way more than anybody else knows about? God knows about them. He knows all the reasons you are not worthy to stand before Him or receive His grace.

But He has also put me here to speak these words, and He has brought you here to listen to them. The words I am called to speak are these: Your sins are forgiven. You are no longer separated from God. He is not angry with you. He has redeemed you. He paid the price for your soul, because He wants you to spend eternity with Him in His bright kingdom. All of your sins have been erased from your record by the blood of Jesus. You might still remember them, others might know them, but God does not see them anymore.

You are no longer a beggar with nothing. You are a child of God who has everything. You have a Father in heaven who loves you so deeply that He was willing to sacrifice His only Son to save you. You have a Savior who is so gracious toward you that He wants you to have everything that is His, everything that He obtained by His own tears, sweat, and blood. You have the Holy Spirit who comes to you through the Word of God filling you with comfort, hope, and peace.

You Have More Than Meets the Eye. You don't need what the rich man had. You need what Lazarus had. And you do have it by the grace of God. Through Moses and the Prophets, through the Evangelists and the Apostles, you have the gift of the Holy Spirit. You have faith in Jesus, who made Himself nothing for your sake (Phi. 2:7), "*so that you by his poverty might become rich*" (2Co. 8:9).

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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