

**First Sunday after Trinity: June 19, 2022**  
**“Heaven and Hell? Really?”**

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. Our text this morning is our Gospel lesson, Luke 16, especially these words, *“There was a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. <sup>20</sup> And at his gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, <sup>21</sup> who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man’s table. Moreover, even the dogs came and licked his sores. <sup>22</sup> The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham’s side. The rich man also died and was buried, <sup>23</sup> and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side.”<sup>1</sup>*

“Feasted sumptuously” – what does this mean? It is not simply eating until one is full. It is not enjoying the gifts that God has given. It is not even eating steak, while your neighbor eats SPAM. The word denotes more. It is an outward event or situation that gives inner joy and gladness. It is not so much the thing itself, as it is the inner drive or peace it gives. We confess the meaning of the First Commandment is to “fear, love, and trust in God above all things.” What does it mean to have a god? *“A god is that to which we look for all good and in which we find refuge in every time of need. To have a god is nothing else than to trust and believe him with our whole heart...the trust and faith of the heart alone make both God and an idol. If your faith and trust are right, then your God is the true God. On the other hand, if your trust is false and wrong, then you have not the true God. For these two belong together, faith and God. That to which your heart clings and entrusts itself is...really your God.”<sup>2</sup>*

Does that mean that we cannot enjoy the gifts of God? No. We are to enjoy them, but not at the expense of our neighbor. We are to enjoy them, but not at the expense of the glory of God’s name. The problem with the rich man was not that he was rich. The problem was he trusted in his riches. He found joy only in the things around him, at the expense of his neighbors. This is shown by his lack of love towards Lazarus. If his faith was right, it would have been shown in love towards Lazarus. It is not that doing good to Lazarus would have saved him; rather, because he had saving faith, the fruit of faith would readily be seen in caring for one of the least.

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 16:19–23

<sup>2</sup> Luther’s Large Catechism, First Part: Ten Commandments, s. 2-3

In like manner, we see in Lazarus a saving faith. Not in that he was poor, but in that he suffered in faith. Poverty and suffering do not make one acceptable to God. But the one who is first made acceptable through the blood of Christ by grace alone through faith alone, that one's suffering is precious in the sight of God as Psalm 116 confesses, "***Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints.***"<sup>3</sup>

While Lazarus could not help with physical goods, he aids with spiritual goods. Even today, long after his death, he still teaches how God has pleasure in us. While the world chases after its feasts of debauchery and its feats of entertainment, Christians commend themselves to God's keeping. During summer, and especially during June, there are many events that entice or force away our time and energy in pursuits of outward events with attempts to bring an inner joy; but nothing can compare to the eternal joy given by Jesus – a foretaste of which we enjoy, here, right now.

Death is an unforgiving stalker. From the moment of conception, the wages of sin is demanded for each child. Many are born and believe they will live forever. On the heels of Trinity Sunday, the reality put before us is black and white – death and life, heaven and hell. Whether you believe or not, have faith or not, death will happen to all. Unless Christ comes back first, death is a reality. There are only two places in the end: God or not God. Heaven is the place of the Messianic feast, an outward event that will give inner joy and gladness in full.

Hell is the place of torment. Literally in our text it is called "Hades," which is "the unseen." It is the only place where God has removed His gracious presence. It's important for us to understand what it means that the rich man is in hell. He's in very real agony. Hell is not just a psychological prison, or a time-out box to think about what you have done, a mere stopping place before you get to heaven. Hell is a very real, very terrible place. Jesus describes hell as a place "***where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.***"<sup>4</sup> There, Jesus says, is "***weeping and gnashing teeth.***"<sup>5</sup>

Heaven and hell are both forever. The judgement happens either when He comes back in all His glory, or when He comes for you individually. We are told these things not to be overwhelmed and anxious about death; but rather, so we are prepared.

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<sup>3</sup> Psalm 116:15

<sup>4</sup> Mark 9:48

<sup>5</sup> Matthew 8:12

Jesus gives us the example of these two men, and sight is important. While both of these men were a sight to see, how God sees is more important than how man sees. The rich man is not accused of adultery, murder or theft. It is not shown that he has done anything to which the world would give censure. He is presented as a man who was honorable and respectable. Even in death, the rich man was buried; that is, he had a funeral to end all funerals. It was a regal affair, and an event to behold.

Lazarus was a sight for sore eyes, literally. He is sick and crippled. He's laid at the gate. Actually, that's too kind a word; really, he's dumped there, and with no care to be given except from scavenger dogs. When he dies, there is no mention of his funeral.

It is not the gifts given to these men; it is not the vocations and the situations they are in that determine their place after death – it is their faith. The rich man set his hope on things of this world; Lazarus set his hope on God.

To understand the faith of these two men, one has to jump to the conversation the rich man has with Abraham. Even in hell, the rich man begs and pleads to send someone back to talk to his brothers. He has no care for Lazarus, or the rest of humanity. His only care is for his brothers.

Sadly, the basis of his faith is still in sight. He is convinced that what one needs to be saved is a big show, an event that the eyes can behold – some outward event or situation that will give inner joy and gladness. It not by faith, but by sight this man lives.

How many today live the same? How many of us live the same? If it's not flashy or fancy, then it's not God. How many of us try to equate God one-to-one with something we can see. We look to some big event, some movement, some episode, some experience, some situation in our daily life that will give me inner joy. America has turned joy into a god. It seeks joy from all sorts of places. Meaning to life is given through all sorts of social justice causes, or social media influences, but they are lacking. These events, while looking flashy and colorful, will never even compare to the true gladness given through the very events of God Himself.

***“We walk by faith, not by sight.”***<sup>6</sup> Abraham’s response to the rich man is fantastic. While the rich man demands a sign, he is turned to the proper sight, ***“They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.”***<sup>7</sup> You have Moses and the prophets, listen to them. You have the Scriptures: Genesis and Exodus and Isaiah, Jeremiah, and all the rest of the Old Testament. You have the writings of Moses, the first recorder of God’s Word. Trusted to write the account of Creation through the Exodus, the one whom God spoke with face-to-face, and Israel’s greatest teacher, second of course only to Jesus. On top of Moses, you have all of the prophets, the Major and the Minor Prophets. You have all of that history. You have all of those teachings and clear proclamations of God’s Word. You knew the signs of the coming Messiah and the works that God has done.

The rich man responds with gusto, ***“No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.”***<sup>8</sup> Moses and the Prophets weren’t enough, the rich man was sure of it. The rich man had lived with the words of Moses and the Prophets; he’d heard the Word of God read and preached, and now he was in hell.

Abraham simply and beautifully replies, ***“If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.”***<sup>9</sup> Only the Word of God can cause someone to repent. It is not your works. It is not your doings. You can be the nicest person, do the greatest works, be part of the biggest events in human history, but if you do not speak the Word of God, if you do not share the Gospel, they will never repent. You can speak of many things. The gifts of God’s creation can be good ways to begin a conversation with somebody, but if you do not eventually get to sharing God’s word, it is nothing but an idle conversation.

It is only the Holy Spirit who can give and sustain faith, which He does through the Word. Even if some big event, like rising from the dead should happen, it means nothing if you do not have faith. God’s Word was useless to the rich man because he rejected it. He called himself a son of Abraham, but he didn’t have the love or faith that Abraham had. Moses and the Prophets exhorted people: love God and love each other.

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<sup>6</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:7

<sup>7</sup> Luke 16:29

<sup>8</sup> Luke 16:30

<sup>9</sup> Luke 16:31

The rich man was only a Sunday morning Christian. He heard, but had no faith. Once He left these doors, the Words of God meant nothing to him. He used none of them to shape his life, only the words of the world. He used none of God's word to shape his business practices, his family relationships, the way he handled his money and possessions, or his relationships with other people. God's Word didn't even have an effect on how he handled tragedies to him or others.

If you do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will you be convinced if someone should rise from the dead. Why? They speak of Jesus, the One who did rise from the dead. They all point to Him, and He proved their words.

We don't need another story to prove that heaven and hell and the resurrection are real. We have many accounts already.

An interesting study for you to do this week is to take a look at those who have been resurrected and recorded for us in Scripture. The Widow at Zarephath had a son who died and Elijah raised him from the dead. Jesus raised another man named Lazarus from the dead. Jesus raised a boy whose family He saw walking in a funeral procession and Jesus was moved by grief for the mother at Nain. Jesus also raised Jairus's Daughter. After Jesus' Ascension and the Day of Pentecost, the Apostle Peter raised Dorcas and Paul raised Eutychus.

Scripture records at least 6 other resurrections besides the Resurrection of Jesus, and what do the people talk about after they are Resurrected? Do they give pictures of heaven? Do they talk about themselves? Do you think if it was important enough for us to know, these people would have said something and God's Word would have recorded it for us? I would think so. But what do we find? Nothing. They say nothing recorded for us. The only one who speaks words for us to know after His Resurrection is Jesus. Take a look this week at the words that He shares after His Resurrection. He says nothing of what heaven looks like. He gives no pictures. He only gives direction and comfort for those on this earth by teaching them how His life and death fulfilled the Law and Prophets. He is the fulfillment of the Scriptures. All that we need to know has already been recorded!

Faith and trust is what Moses and the Prophets declare. Faith is believing that God is a merciful God! Yes, he *has* had mercy on us. He saw us in our state of sin and misery, and He sent Jesus to die on the cross, to be the propitiation for our sin.

Jesus was crucified, died and was buried. The third day He rose, defeating our enemies and obtaining eternal joy—the bliss and blessing of heaven—for each one of us. How did people respond to that resurrection? Some believed; some doubted, and some even tried to cover it up.

For those that die in faith their souls are not just merely in God’s hand in a general feel-good sort of way, they in fact dwell with Christ. They look to the resurrection of the dead when they will fully, body and soul, be with Christ in Paradise. Whatever our afflictions may be, whether we are like Lazarus and have physical troubles, whether we have homes or property destroyed by weather, or we are like the rich man and have the temptation to trust and idolize our stuff, looking for events to give inner joy – God has given it!

St. Paul writes, ***“So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.”***<sup>10</sup>

Many want another sign today. The rich man wants a sure sign for his brothers. You have it! In fact, you have more than a sign. God’s love and mercy poured out on the cross is poured out over you in baptism. In outward proclamation and reading of God’s Word, His word pours into your ears. As you pour out your sins at confession, He pours out His grace through absolution. At this altar, you are reminded that death is real, and Jesus has died to destroy death eternally for you.

Baptism, confession/absolution, the read and preached Word, the Lord’s Supper – all outward events which give joy and gladness beyond all understanding. It gives heaven. It gives Jesus. It gives forgiveness and life eternal. Amen.

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

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<sup>10</sup> 2 Corinthians 4:16-18

**Prayer of the Church****First Sunday after Trinity: 19 June 2022**

O Lord God, pour out Your Holy Spirit upon us, that like Abraham we may believe Your promises to us in Christ, and it may be counted to us for righteousness. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O Lord God, You have given Matthew, our Synod president; Brian, our district president; Sam, our circuit visitor; and all our pastors so that we may hear Moses and the prophets and so be convinced by the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Make their proclamation fruitful among us, that we may not fall into the torments of hades but be carried by the angels to Abraham's side in heaven. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O Lord God, from whom all fatherhood is named, we give You thanks for earthly fathers. Give them confidence in their station and zeal for their task to care for their families faithfully. Make them examples to their children of godly life and love of Your Word. Bless their work of bringing up children in the fear and instruction of the Lord, and give them the comfort of Your absolution over all their shortcomings. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O Lord God, Your Word teaches that a great army cannot save the king and a war horse is a false hope for salvation. Grant that our nation would not put its hope in the strength of our warriors, but in You. Bless and keep those who serve in our military, and use them as Your arm to guard and deliver us from all our enemies. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Loving Father, we give thanks that in Holy Baptism we receive forgiveness of sins, deliverance from death and the devil, and eternal salvation, bless those who celebrate baptismal anniversaries this week, especially, *Michael and Carol*, bless also those who celebrate their birthdays; *Michael, Cayli, and Marcia*. Grant that they may grow in grace, continue to know Your loving-kindness, abide in the confession of Your care and protection, serve You faithfully all the days of their life and finally come to the fullness of Your joys in heaven; Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord God, Heavenly Father, we give thanks for the joy and blessings that You have granted *Marvin & Carol and Mike & Tina* during the years of their marriage. Assist them always by Your grace that with true fidelity and steadfast love they may ever honor and keep their marriage vows, grow in love towards You and for each other, and come at last to the eternal joys that You have promised; Lord in Your mercy; **hear our prayer.**

O Lord God, uphold all who suffer in body or mind. Deliver the sick and suffering according to Your will, give peace to the lonely and downtrodden, give strength to the recovering, and comfort to the dying, especially *Marvin, Ruth, Pam, Zoey, Ellie, John, David, Merrill Hicks, Greg, Pastor Small (St. Silas, North Liberty), Pat and those we name in our hearts*]. Be their help and their shield, and remind them of the great reward You have prepared for them in Christ. Grant them health and healing in accord with Your perfect will, and sustain their faith in You. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O Lord God, give repentance and faith to all who come to Your altar this day, that we would not come seeking sumptuous earthly food, but that we would discern Your true body and blood for the forgiveness of sins and receive it in the unity of a true confession. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O Lord God, You have granted to Abraham more descendants than the stars in that great multitude who shine in the glory of Your presence. Make us his heirs also by faith, and so bring us at last to rejoice with him eternally before You. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord God, heavenly Father, we implore You to rule and govern our hearts by Your Holy Spirit, that we may not, like the rich man, hear Your Word in vain and become so devoted to things temporal that we forget things eternal; but that we may serve those who are in need readily and according to our ability, not defiling ourselves with carousing or pride. In trial and misfortune, keep us from despair, and let us trust in Your fatherly help and grace, that in faith and Christian patience we may overcome all things; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**