

Where Is Your Trust?

Luke 16:19-31

(adapted from a sermon by Rev. David Petersen while serving Grace Ev. Lutheran Church, Fairgrove, MI)

What is to be learned from this story about the poor beggar Lazarus and the rich man who died on the same day? Specifically, what is Jesus – true God – trying to teach us with His message?

First of all we ought to notice that the one who is blessed in this story is not the one who lives in the lap of luxury, but rather it is the one covered with sores, who is too weak to beat off the dogs. How can that be?

Our culture's normal view of the world is skewed. God chastens those whom He loves. In grace and mercy God keeps the beggar Lazarus close to Himself in suffering. God does not allow the temptations of this world ***INCLUDING, THE JOYS OF THIS WORLD*** to come between Lazarus and Himself.

The rich man fares sumptuously every day, but that is, only every day of this short life. In the next he suffers the torments of hell forever. To put that in perspective, the beggar Lazarus' worst day of suffering in ***this*** short life is not as bad as only an instant in hell. What is more, that suffering which he endures is short lived, and not worthy of comparing to the glory that was revealed in him when He came into God's eternal glory.

Secondly, we ought to recognize that the rich man suffers eternal damnation, that's right, hell. No, everybody does not go heaven – in spite of what many proclaim today. Adding complexity to the issue, there is a gulf between heaven and hell, and it is a fixed gulf. Even if he wanted to, the beggar Lazarus cannot dip his finger in the water and go down and cool the rich man's tongue. Dear friends, heaven and hell are no game.

Finally, we ought to notice the character of unbelief, that is, we should note that which brings about damnation. Holy Scripture does not pity those who never had the chance, or those who had a false faith in a false god. There is no pity, even if they were sincere and meant well. Our Lord explained His mission, His purpose for taking on human flesh to Nicodemus in the verses following last week's Gospel lesson. He also explained damnation to Nicodemus, in that third chapter of John, saying:

"For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God." (John 3:17-21 NKJV)

It does not matter if the unbelievers were sincere, devout, and meant well. It does not matter if they

kept their lawns trimmed, supported the community, and sent their kids to college. It does not matter if they come from good families where the Bible is read every day at the breakfast table, or how they were raised. What matters is that they do not believe in the Name of the only begotten Son of God, and by their unbelief, they thereby condemn themselves.

It is not God's fault they don't believe, it is their own. It is not God's fault that they are eternally damned, it is their own. For as we heard last Sunday, Jesus did not come to condemn the world but to save the world.

Do you see the arrogant obstinance in the rich man. Concerning the rich man's unbelieving brothers, Father Abraham says: "They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them." The rich man thinks that Moses and the prophets, in other words, the Holy Scriptures, are not enough. Yes, his family appeared outwardly to be Jews. They had heard and maybe even read the Scriptures. But, they did not believe. So, the rich man pleads with Abraham, He says: "No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent."

The Word of God is not enough? The testimony of Holy Scripture is not enough? The miracles of Jesus are not enough? The witness of the Church is not enough? Father Abraham sees through the smoke that the man is blowing his way. He recognizes unbelief and he replies: "If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced is someone should rise from the dead."

Ah, now there is the rub. These are not innocent bystanders! They are unbelievers! Why? It is their own fault, their own most grievous fault that they do not believe. Pay attention to this point, they are unbelievers even though they have the Scriptures. They are unbelievers even though they were probably part of the Jewish religious community. And yes, someone did rise from the dead, Jesus Christ and it was proved by many indisputable proofs, but the world still rejects that fact – and thereby rejects Him who rose.

But what of Lazarus, how is he so different? Does he merit salvation by his suffering? Has he paid for his own sins? Of course not! He is saved by simple grace. He enjoys the riches of heaven by God's grace at Christ's expense, by undeserved love and compassion from the Father. Ultimately, by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross. It is not who Lazarus is that saves him, it is who *Jesus* is, and the faith given Lazarus by the Holy Spirit whom Jesus sends.

So, what does all that mean for us? Listen to the first phrase of the Collect for today: O God, the Strength of all them that put their trust in Thee. Listen again to the first few lines of our Epistle: So we have come to know and believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment.

Here is the lesson Christ is trying to teach: Place your trust not in the things of this world – like the rich man did. Repent of such selfish and foolish desires. Ask yourself these questions: What have I loved more than God? My car, my house, my games, my body, sports, the Packers, fishing, hunting, my wife, my children, myself? What have I trusted more than God? My science, my reason, my intellect, my abilities, my job, my paycheck? What have I feared more than God? My mortality, my sicknesses, my weaknesses, the weather? Ultimately, in other words, what have I *not*

loved, trusted, or feared more than God?

Repent, for the rich man's sins are yours. And then, place yourself into the beggar Lazarus' place. Be weak, as weak can be, so weak that you are not even able to beat off the dogs that come to lick your wounds. Then, live not by your own strength, but by the grace and mercy of God in Christ Jesus!

It is in Christ that you receive the forgiveness of your sins. He loved His Father with all His might. He trusted His Father above all things. He feared His Father more than all else. And finally, He was obedient to the will of His Father, even to the point of death upon a cross.

That love of God in Christ is imparted to you when you are declared forgiven. Christ is made yours: His righteousness covers you; His trust of the Father becomes yours; His fear of the Father is imputed to you; and His obedience to the Father's will He gives you through faith. In Christ, you are forgiven for your lack of trust in God above all things.

In Christ Jesus, there is hope, comfort, peace. You, who cannot take care of yourself or feed yourself. Instead, come and be fed by Him. Do not eat the crumbs that fall from the King's table, but be a guest of honor at His great banquet, His New Testament in His Blood!

In this grace and mercy – that is not from yourself – but is from Him, and is who He is, and is who you now are, in Him – in this incomprehensible love, be bold as you consider the day of judgment, embrace it, and eagerly expect it.

Turn to our sermon hymn again, number 768/231. Pray with the hymn writer:

LSB... To God the Holy Spirit let us pray, for the true faith needed on our way,
That He may defend us when life is ending, And from exile home we are wending.
Lord, have mercy. (And verse 4) Shine in our hearts, O Spirit, precious light,
Teach us Jesus Christ to know aright, That we may abide in the Lord who brought
us, Till to our true home He has brought us. Lord, have mercy.

TLH... We now implore God the Holy Ghost, For the true faith, which we need the
most, That in our last moments He may befriend us, And, as homeward we journey,
attend us. Lord, have mercy. (And verse 2) Shine in our hearts, O most
precious Light, that we Jesus Christ may know aright, Clinging to our Savior,
whose blood hath bought us, Who again to our homeland hath brought us. Lord,
have mercy.

This is our comfort, that Jesus Christ has purchased us from sin and death. Christ it is who has come to us and given us faith to trust in Him alone. Today, He comes to you in His most gracious Word. He fills you with Himself, building you up to trust those thing that you hear. He comes to you in His blessed sacrament to feed you of Himself, to forgive you your sins and feed your faith, to give you eternal life and salvation.

As Lazarus, trust not your riches, *or* your lack of them. Trust instead in your God who promises to keep you in the true faith that alone will bring you to your eternal home. Trust that His rich gifts,

His Word and His Sacrament, will build you up in that faith. Indeed, you are blessed in Christ, unto life everlasting, with Lazarus in the bosom of Abraham. Amen.