

The One Thing You Need

St. Lucy

Matthew 13:44-52

adapted from a sermon by Rev. John M. Berg
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Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

During this month of December we are often asked the question, what do you want for Christmas? If you are a child you probably have a list of toys or games that you would like to get. If your children are like my sons, they have been looking at ads in the newspapers, especially the Fleet Farm Toyland circular. I remember as a child that it was the Sears Christmas 'wish book'. Adults even have lists of stuff that they would like to receive, from clothing to books, and TVs. Some even want some of those silly things that we see "only on TV" – like 'atomic beam flashlight' or a hurricane spin scrubber, or maybe the red copper square pan!

There is only one thing that you all really need! It is better than anything that Walmart or even Sears carries. You adults might want to know that it is the best piece of property that you could ever have. This is so good, you don't even have to take out a mortgage. Even better, you never have to pay taxes on it. It is free! "What is it?" you ask? The Kingdom of heaven. Want to know how you get it?

Luther puts it this way in his *Small Catechism*, "The kingdom of God certainly comes by itself without our prayer, but we pray in this petition that it may come to us also." How does God's Kingdom come? "God's Kingdom comes when our heavenly Father gives us His Holy Spirit, so that by His grace we believe His holy Word and lead godly lives here in time and there in eternity."

The Kingdom of heaven is none other than Jesus Christ the Word made flesh who forgives all of our sins and cleanses all unrighteousness. Jesus Christ is the most precious treasure that you have! Sometimes you and I forget this don't we? We forget that the only thing we really need is the forgiveness of sins which Jesus Christ earned for us on the cross when He suffered and died. The only thing we really need is the forgiveness He purchased and gives to us in His word of Holy Absolution, in the preached Word, and in His body and blood in the Sacrament!

There was a young Christian girl by the name of Lucy who knew this! Lucy, actually her name is Lucia was born in Sicily, Italy in 283 AD to very rich parents. Her father died when she was very young. Her mother Eutychia raised her and taught her about Jesus.

Lucia was taught well by her parents and pastors. She learned to know, at a very early age, that even though she came from the home of wealthy parents – the most precious treasure that she had was Jesus Christ and the forgiveness that He earned for her by dying on the cross for her.

Lucy begged her mother to give their money to people that were less fortunate than her but her mother would not allow it. Then, something happened that changed her mother's mind. You see, her mother was very sick. She suffered from a chronic flow of blood. Lucia prayed that her mother might be healed. God did as she requested of Him, the hemorrhage stopped. In response

to this gift of healing, Lucia's mother allowed Lucia to give the vast portion of their family's wealth to the poor.

There was just one problem. Lucia had been unwillingly betrothed to a deceitful young man who was not a Christian. He loved Lucia's riches more than her. So, when she gave away her wealth, he was furious. His greediness moved him to get revenge. He went to the governor of Sicily and told them that Lucia was a Christian.

In the year 303, Christianity was still illegal and the Christians were ordered to be persecuted. All someone had to do was denounce a person publicly to the authorities, and the person would be arrested. If they did not deny the Christian faith by cursing Christ and offering incense to Caesar they would be killed.

Lucia found herself in a dire predicament. Yet, even under the threat of death, she did not deny her faith in Christ. As a result, she was tortured! her eyes were gouged out, and she was burned at the stake. Her martyr's death immediately made her famous in Sicily and the story of her life and death, with some embellishments lives on to this day, particularly in Sweden.

Swedish Lutherans remember her by having one of the daughters of the house dress in a white robe with a crown of lighted candles and go singing from room to room early in the morning while it is still dark to awaken the other family members and to offer them cakes of bread. There are several reasons for these traditions. The Lights symbolize that she believed that Jesus Christ was the light of the world, the light no darkness can overcome. The white robe is a reminder that her sins, like yours and mine, were washed away and she, like you and I, was cleansed white by the blood of the Lamb. The gift of bread reminds us of Lucia's faith that Jesus is the Bread of Life.

Now while all of these things are interesting and perhaps even noteworthy – that is not what this season of Advent and Christmas is all about. The reason we remember St. Lucy is not because of these tantalizing tidbits of trivia. Instead, we remember her because we are to be reminded of what was and still is today, Lucia's most priceless treasure – the same treasure that you and I are to cherish – Jesus Christ the Word made flesh!

Your greatest treasure, the one thing you need, is Jesus who burst into our world as the babe of Bethlehem – who though He was rich, yet for our sakes became poor, that we through His poverty might become rich with the forgiveness of sins, life and salvation.

This is your greatest treasure – the pearl of great price – the one thing you need. May you once again this Christmas season focus on the gift that truly matters!

As we remember Lucia, she continues to bear witness to Jesus Christ the Savior of all. She bore witness to a belief in God as the Creator who can and will provide all of our daily needs. And in death she bore witness to God as the Recreator, who overcomes even death. She testified that she loved the Lord Jesus and His salvation even more than life itself. She knew that the only way to have life in the world to come is to lay down your life in this present world, to take up your cross and follow Christ.

You may not be called to be a martyr, but you are, just as Lucia does, to bear witness to Christ who is the light of the world. You are to crucify the Old Adam in you, that Christ and His life may show forth in you and through you.

This Christian life of repentance and faith is not an easy one to live. It is a narrow road you are called to run. But along this road, you are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses and even martyrs – Abraham, Joseph, Moses, David all of the prophets and apostles, saints and martyrs. And above all you are upheld by Jesus who laid this path and ran it for you. Consider Jesus so that you do not grow weary and lose heart. “Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the author and perfecter of our faith, who through the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” This is the one thing you need. Amen.