

**In the Name of the Father and of the ☩ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.**

**Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ and may our Lord and Savior sanctify you in the truth, for His word is truth. Amen**

**First Sunday after Trinity (2022)**

**There is No Mercy in Hell**

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*“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.” (Luke 16:24–25, ESV)*

The Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, the Gospel Reading for today, does more than just open our eyes to the two main characters of the parable, it also reveals the Scriptural truth regarding the state of the soul between death and resurrection, it shows the horrors of eternal damnation, it describes some of the activity of God’s “good angels,” and it conveys the clarity of Holy Scripture. We pray that the Holy Spirit will open your hearts and minds to these Scriptural truths as we look at the contrast that exists between the two main characters in this parable: Lazarus and the Rich Man.

Lazarus is a poor man. His life is pathetic, even pitiable. He is sickly, an outcast, unable to provide for himself. Moreover, in addition to being poor, wretched, and sickly Lazarus appears to be a cripple because he must be carried and laid before the gate of the rich man’s house every day, laying there throughout the day humbly begging for help. Oh if he could only receive a little of what fell from the rich man’s table. But it appears every day ended with hunger.

Lazarus is the perfect recipient for almsgiving, but the parable implies that the rich man totally ignores Lazarus. Every day, as he leaves his house, he passes by Lazarus as if he were nothing more than gutter trash. God gave the rich man the perfect reason for showing mercy, He gave him Lazarus, but the rich man failed. Furthermore, as if it was not enough for Lazarus to be humiliated by the rich man’s snobbery, he was further humiliated by being unable to ward off the dogs who came to lick his sores. But, Lazarus had one great thing the rich man didn’t; his name was written in heaven.

Jesus tells us *“The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham’s side.” (Luke 16:22, ESV)* We take great comfort in this comment. Scripture tells us the angels have a deep and abiding interest in the Church, the children of God. Some are God’s avengers, remember Sodom and Gomorrah. Others are God’s messengers; they announced the birth of our Lord Jesus. They are also interested in the children of man as they rejoice over every sinner who repents. (Luke 15:10). Furthermore, angels are important for we see them at the chief events in the kingdom of God. So, what great comfort Scripture gives us when we hear our Lord Jesus say angels carried Lazarus to Abraham’s side: carrying him to heaven, for a day will come when we who believe in the atoning sacrifice of Jesus for the forgiveness of their sins, will, like Lazarus, be carried to heaven by angels.

On the other hand, the rich man is the prototypical opposite of Lazarus. He is rich, he dresses in fine clothing, he is healthy, he is free to come and go as he pleases, he feasts sumptuously every day: he is living the good life. Now these things in and of themselves do not make the rich man a bad person. But he is out of control. He has lost the ability to be compassionate. He has

lost the ability to love his neighbor as himself. Wealth, position, lavish living, these things have consumed his life and hardened his heart. His life and attitude towards others can be characterized in the way he treats Lazarus: Lazarus, who is he? I have no time for such wretched people. Let them eat cake. He is the perfect example of the Pharisees who Jesus identified as lovers of money (Luke 16:14). Then he dies.

Oh my goodness, the rich man died! No longer does he live in the luxury of his wealth, able to command and receive whatever he desires at the snap of his fingers. No, suddenly he finds himself in a place where he never thought he would be, he finds himself in ***“Hades,” (Luke 16:23, ESV)***, that is hell. Oh, yes, hell is a real place, just ask Jesus.

Eternal damnation, eternal banishment from the sight of God, forever excluded from communion with God. This is hell. This is the place of the doomed, those who find themselves on the left side of Jesus on judgment day. Those to whom He says, ***“Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.” (Matthew 25:41, ESV)*** These will be cast into eternal darkness, banished, excluded from all joy and delight. Banished from the face of God for all time to endure the unbearable suffering of body and soul in hell with Satan and his demons.

Abandoned by God, this is the state in which the rich man now finds himself. No more second chances. For all time, eternal damnation. “Oh,” he must be thinking, “why wasn’t I kinder, more attentive to my neighbor? Why didn’t I listen to and live by God’s command, to ***“love your neighbor as yourself.” (Leviticus 19:18, ESV)*** I am a Jew, I knew better, but no, instead of loving God, I ignored my neighbor. I thought I was safe because I was a child of Abraham, but look at me now, enslaved in hell for all eternity with no chance of escape.

Then, in the midst of his torment in the flames of hell, he looks across the abyss and sees Lazarus. He recognizes him as the beggar who laid out in front of his house day after day. Yes, he ignored him, but look, he knew his name: Lazarus. Look at Lazarus now, relaxing at the side of Abraham in heaven. Who would have thought he would be welcomed into heaven? He was such a pitiable person. But there he is, and I, I am here. Irony of irony. Here Christ opens our eyes to the state of the soul between death and the resurrection. Unbelievers and unrepentant sinners in hell, tormented forever, believers in heaven, comforted forever.

Seeking relief the rich man cries out, ***“Father Abraham, have mercy on me.” (v. 24)*** The one who showed no mercy to Lazarus, now seeks mercy from Abraham. This again is irony of ironies. He pleads, ***“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)***

The rich man begs for mercy, but none is forthcoming. He begs for mercy, without confessing his sin. There is no repentance in his voice. Realizing his suffering is for eternity, he simply hopes for momentary relief from the heat of the flame. As in life, so in hell, the rich man only thinks of himself. Please Abraham, send that lowly servant Lazarus to me to give me relief. Even the flames of hell do not change him. However, the relief he seeks is not forthcoming. Abraham responds, saying, ***“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.” (v. 25)*** Lazarus is receiving the reward promised to all who believe and remained steadfast in the faith. But the rich man, he is receiving his punishment for not remaining steadfast in the faith. Moreover, to ensure these two states of life after death cannot be mingled, God has created a great chasm between heaven and hell, one too large to cross.

Although Scripture reveals little regarding the state of the soul between death and the resurrection, primarily pointing us to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, to Judgment Day. In the parable of Lazarus and the rich man, Jesus gives us a holy glimpse. The souls of unbelievers and unrepentant sinners are kept in the prison of **“Hades”**, a place of punishment. While on the other hand, believers are held in the hand of God, dwelling with Christ in Paradise. Moreover, contrary to eternal damnation in hell, the life of a believing soul in heaven is an eternal communion with Christ, a blissful state, a blessed state of comfort and joy with God.

Contrary to the thinking of some, Scripture is clear, there is no hope for the conversion of the condemned, departed soul and no departed soul will return to this world. The writer to the Hebrews tells us, **“Just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.”** (Hebrews 9:27–28, *ESV*) And St. Paul tells us, **“There is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus,”** (1 Timothy 2:5, *ESV*) Therefore, all prayers for the dead are useless, so, too, is calling on departed saints to intercede for us on earth.

So the parable of Lazarus and the rich man asks this question, “Are you haughty, are you arrogant, are you proud? When your neighbor is in need, do you ignore him? Do you consider yourself superior to your neighbor? Do you see him as unworthy of your concern or care? Is your heart hardened like the rich man’s?” If so, beware, for God says, **“For though the LORD is high, he regards the lowly, but the haughty he knows from afar.”** (Psalm 138:6, *ESV*) He also says, **“Whoever has a haughty look and an arrogant heart I will not endure.”** (Psalm 101:5, *ESV*) And again He says, **“Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.”** (Proverbs 16:18, *ESV*)

However, for the humble God says, **“For the LORD takes pleasure in his people; he adorns the humble with salvation.”** (Psalm 149:4, *ESV*) Again He says, **“God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”** (James 4:6, *ESV*) And again He says, **“The LORD lifts up the humble; he casts the wicked to the ground.”** (Psalm 147:6, *ESV*) And finally, He says, **“For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”** (Luke 14:11, *ESV*) Hell awaits the haughty, the arrogant, and the proud, but heaven awaits the humble, the contrite, and the repentant.

This truth of Holy Scripture is meant to put the fear of hell into the hearts of sinners. However, it is too late for the rich man. In his anguish, he suddenly remembers his five brothers who are still alive on earth living just as he once did: haughtily, arrogantly, and proudly, living to themselves, uncaring others. In deep concern for them he begs Abraham to send Lazarus to earth to warn his brothers to change their ways lest they, too, end up in the same place of torment he is in. But Abraham reminds him they have the same opportunity he did, **“They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.”** (Luke 16:29, *ESV*) Here we see that faith is created from the clarity of Holy Scripture, especially from the Gospel, and St. Paul makes this clear in his letter to the Romans, writing, **“So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.”** (Romans 10:17, *ESV*)

The clarity of Scripture consists in the fact that it presents, in language that can be understood by all, what men must know to be saved. Through the Scriptures we are taught to judge truth and error. Moreover, we are to use the Scriptures, not the wisdom of men, in interpreting Scriptures. We are to be like the Bereans, who after having received the Word with all eagerness from St. Paul, examined **“the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.”** (Acts 17:11, *ESV*) Proclaiming God’s Word of Holy Scripture, Law and Gospel to unbelievers and unrepentant sinners, this is Evangelism, especially the proclamation of the Gospel of salvation in the name of

Jesus Christ. If you want your brothers to stay out of “*Hades*,” that place of eternal torment, show them, read them, and teach them the Scriptures so the Holy Spirit may enlighten them and bring them to true saving faith.

Souls being tormented in hell is not God’s desire for man. To the contrary, God “*desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.*” (1 Timothy 2:4, ESV) He rejects the haughty and receives those who are “*humble and contrite in spirit and tremble at [His] word.*” (Isaiah 66:2, ESV) He does not desire the sacrifice of animals, but rather the Psalmist tells us, “*The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.*” (Psalm 51:17, ESV) These attributes the rich man failed to have, he failed to humble himself, to be contrite, repentant, or to seek God’s forgiveness. He rejected God’s mercy while living on earth and sought it in the one place where it will never be given: in hell.

The rich man lived for himself, for his pleasure, living outside the covenant of God, but as has been said, God desires that all men be saved. Therefore, as God sent His angels to carry Lazarus to heaven, He also sent His only begotten Son to earth to be our Redeemer that we may be carried to heaven by His angels. He sent His Son, Jesus Christ into this world to show us true humility, true meekness, and true poverty. He sent “*him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*” (2 Corinthians 5:21, ESV) He sent His Son to take our sins, our sin of pride, haughtiness, and arrogance upon Himself, and thereby to receive the consequence of our sin upon Himself. He sent His Son to receive His wrath in our place, He sent His Son to save us from the same end as the rich man. Oh how merciful is our God who gave His only begotten Son upon the Altar of the Cross as an atoning sacrifice for the forgiveness of our sins. By His obedient life and death He assuaged God’s anger against us, exchanging God’s anger for our justification. He did not pass us by, but gave of Himself, kneeling by our sickly soul, healing it, and granting it renewed life, everlasting life in heaven. To ensure that we could be incorporated into this new covenant of His Son, He gave us the blessings of His Word and Holy Baptism, making us children of His, granting us the Holy Spirit and faith. Furthermore, to keep us in this new covenant, He gives us His Son’s body and blood in and under bread and wine, in a blessed, divine meal that grants His continual forgiveness while also strengthening our faith and keeping us on the heavenly path He so desires we remain on. Look at all God has done for you to keep you in His new covenant, to keep you from being like the rich man and thereby, to keep you out of the fire of hell. God is merciful.

To be sure, the parable of Lazarus and the rich man clearly shows *there is no mercy in hell*. But thanks to our heavenly Father, it also shows that He granted us His mercy by directing us to His Word, bringing us to saving faith in Jesus Christ, saving us from His eternal wrath in hell while granting us His eternal mercy in heaven. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.