

Luke 16:19-31
Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost
September 28, 2025

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

"[Abraham] said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.'"

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

You perhaps recall from last week the parable of the shrewd, but unfaithful steward – the son of this world – whose idolization of the “unrighteous wealth” (the daily bread) was described by Jesus in a way that trapped and condemned the Pharisees in their own love of money. But you might also recall that the deeper underlying theme was that of self-certainty, self-righteousness of those who justify themselves by their status of insiders, of those “in the house” (though they completely misuse and abuse the true riches of the Messiah!), those who have no fear of God or respect for His holy Law.

We certainly can sense in this morning’s (perhaps more well-known) account a similar *two-fold* warning. On the one hand, there is a clear condemnation of those who love unrighteous wealth more than righteous wealth... who love money and daily bread more than God and His promises regarding eternal life... those who (as Jesus said last week) “love the one and hate the other, or are devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God *and* money.”

And so, in this morning's text, that teaching certainly continues with the rich man who, Abraham says to him in the parable, "You in your lifetime received your good things." The man is not condemned *for his wealth*, just as Lazarus is not saved *on account of his poverty*... but it's the *love and confidence* in unrighteous wealth, to the point that one has *disregard for* the concerns of the righteous wealth. Isn't that what our Old Testament reading says?:

"Woe to those who are *at ease* in Zion, and [woe] to those who *feel secure* on the mountain of Samaria." Interpret that rightly: as we said last week, Amos was preaching to a people not unlike our own, where love of worldly (unrighteous, daily bread) wealth tempted them to assume they were favored by God and in good standing before Him in matters of the *righteous* wealth. But it's not the mere *presence* of abundant daily bread that is the reason they have divine "woe's" heaped upon them. Rather, it's that they worship and trust such abundant daily bread so as to believe "all is well" before God... no need for self-examination; no need for repentance. How does our Old Testament reading say it?:

"Woe to those who are at ease... who feel secure... who lie on beds of ivory... stretch themselves out on their couches...eat lambs from the flock... sing idle songs... drink wine in bowls" (is *any of that* in and of itself sinful? No! However... they do all *this*) "but are not grieved over the ruin of Joseph!"

When one cannot be bothered to grieve over his sins, to see the ruin impenitence brings upon God's people, and thus can't be bothered to repent, and feels so certain he has no need for the safety of fleeing to Christ, then *what* is the divine judgment? – "Therefore," the LORD declares, "they shall now be the *first* of those who go into exile, and [their] revelry shall pass away." Weeks ago, when Jesus told us to "Strive to enter through the narrow door," he concluded, "Some who are last will be first, and some are first who will be last." To be first to go into eternal exile is probably not what we had in mind.

But there is where the self-secure end up. Look at the rich man in today's parable, who was so self-secure and surrounded by so *much* in this life... yet found himself in eternal anguish, without even the *waterdrop* he sought to cool the tongue... that one drop of water you can imagine hanging tantalizingly from the tip of Lazarus' finger. Not even that was the rich man's eternal inheritance. All his earthly wealth, all of the abundance of unrighteous wealth, could not buy him even a drop of cool water. On this *first* warning, regarding the idolization of unrighteous wealth, Christ is abundantly clear.

On the other hand... (recall, I said there was a two-fold warning). On the *one* hand, the warning is against the pharisees' idolization of earthly wealth; *on the other hand*, the other warning we heard last week came when I mentioned that there were two

important verses not included at the end of last week's Reading that probably should have been... verses in which Jesus warned, The Law and the Prophets were until John; since then the good news of the kingdom of God is preached, and everyone forces his way into it. But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one dot of the Law to become void."

I made sure to add that last week, why? Why does that matter *today*? Because, at the end of today's parable, how does Abraham reply when the rich man wants Abraham to send Lazarus to warn his living brothers? Abraham replies: "They have Moses (the Law) and the Prophets; let them hear them." And the rich man replied, "No, father Abraham; if someone goes to them *from the dead*, they will repent!" And Abraham doubles down, "If they do not hear [the Law] and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead."

There's the *other* warning, not only to the pharisees, but also to us. In our self-certainty, our self-righteousness, if we yawn at the Law and the Prophets, *then what*? The rich man thought that the news of someone back from the dead would cause his still-living brothers to *what*? – repent. He now knew, too late for him but not for his brothers, the *safety* of repentant humility before the Law and Prophets of God. Where we hear Moses and the Prophets, we will *recognize* our need for the Messiah. Where we self-righteously sit in

the house and merely feign agreement with Moses and the Prophets, we will *yawn* at the Messiah.

After all, does Jesus himself not say that Moses and the Prophets all point to *Him*! “O foolish ones and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken”, He says the very day of his resurrection, to the disciples on the road to Emmaus. “And *beginning with Moses and all the Prophets*,” Luke records, Jesus interpreted to those Emmaus disciples all the Scriptures concerning himself.

The Law and the Prophets all point to Him – Him who emptied Himself and became nothing, Him who took on the sinner’s poverty, that in Him we might become rich – the righteousness of God. That’s what all the Law and Prophets preach about the great exchange between the Messiah and those he came to save... all of us poor Lazaruses, who exhale our poverty, “I a poor miserable sinner confess unto You all my sins and iniquities” – I repent... that same repentance that evaded the rich man in his self-assurance, too proud to consider his lowly estate... no, instead, we learn to exhale the truth, “I a poor miserable sinner repent of all my sins and iniquities... but, for the sake of the holy, innocent, bitter sufferings and death of Your beloved Son, Jesus Christ”, for the sake of Him to whom all the Law and Prophets pointed, Him whose incarnation into history is *recorded* so that it might forever be *reported*... “for his sake, I beg you” (for that’s what beggars do... not to win favor or pull heart

strings, we beg out of our poverty... but, with absolute confidence in Him to whom the Law and Prophets point): “for the sake of Your Son Jesus Christ, have mercy on us.”

Yes, it is rightly natural to us poor Lazaruses that we beg. For the Law and the Prophets point us to our salvation in Jesus the Messiah... (1) by recording the history of the lineage through which the Christ would come, and also (2) by bringing sinners to repentance – that’s how Abraham helped the rich man connect the dots, isn’t it? “If your brothers won’t repent at the Law and the Prophets, they won’t repent if a man rises from the dead!” – that’s how the Law and Prophets point to the Messiah: by bringing sinners to repentance and the safety of Christ and the lowly humility that is baptismally clothed *in Him* before the holy God.

Indeed, that’s what we see in Lazarus, isn’t it? Does Jesus highlight Lazarus because Lazarus is supposedly a sympathy-deserving figure? No! The parable isn’t about us feeling bad for Lazarus, as if he *deserves* God’s love or his misery *merits* God’s love. The parable recognizes Lazarus to be as poor and worthless as they come! That’s you and me. We sinners are so poor and miserable that even the dogs lick our wounds... indeed, we look up to them for (as said elsewhere in the Gospels) “even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from the master’s table” and Lazarus, the text says, could only “*desire* to be fed with what fell from the rich man’s table.” Yes, Lazarus is not “poor Lazarus” because he deserves sympathy. Lazarus

is poor Lazarus because he has nothing, no ability, to get out of his poverty. He cannot valiantly bear his crosses; he can't bandage his wounds; he can't stand tall and proud on his own two feet. That's you and me... no ability to improve our lot.

And yet, in Christ's mercy, it's Lazarus – and only Lazarus – who, in the parable, is known by name. Lazarus is remembered by name, not because he's sympathy *deserving*, but because Christ named him and knows his name: "I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep." And again, Jesus says that He as the keeper of the gate (or the narrow door) "knows his sheep by name and leads them out." So, what *joy* belongs to Lazarus; he is known by name. That's *also* you and me... baptismally you and me.

The scornful world may look at us and see nothing but a poor miserable beggar. And Luther even echoes their sentiment with his dying words, "We are beggars all!" That's you and me.

But the poor beggar is known by his merciful God; just as Lazarus is known by name, so are you. And just as Lazarus received the good things of the true riches in *eternal* life, so also is that *your* inheritance. And just as Lazarus was *lifted* from the depth of his poverty to benefit from an even *greater* rich man's Table... so you, too, have a seat at the table of the feast that even the poor miserable beggar can afford: "Come, eat and drink without price."

So, hear the Word of the Lord and cherish how the Holy Spirit points you to your salvation through Moses and the Prophets. After

all, the whole world has the historical truth of someone who has returned victorious from the grave... and yet, just as Abraham explained in the parable, even when someone rises from the grave, the world will not believe if they ignored Moses and the Prophets.

But, as those verses between last week's text and this morning's text say, the Law and the Prophets until John all pointed to Christ – our *need* for Christ, our salvation in Christ. And John was the culminating voice: "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." By that Lamb of God, our poverty becomes wealth, our lowly humility becomes exalted glory, our death becomes life... so that we can bear all the burdens of this valley of sorrows, even have our sores licked by dogs!, and have confidence in the wealth to come, the resurrection and life to come, the glory to come ... for all us **Lazaruses** – worthy of not even sympathy, but known by name and loved by God.

Indeed, isn't it amazing that, though this parable is *really* about the rich man... (it's really about Jesus continuing to drive home the point that the pharisees ought not depend on their love of money or their status as those "in the house", but ought depend on Christ alone!)... though this parable is really about *the rich man*, nevertheless we are all drawn to Lazarus. Why? Because we all know deep down we are truly *him*. We want to reinterpret that to mean we are worthy of sympathy. But that's not the Gospel. We are

beggars all, and yet known by Christ – by name! – and even beneficiaries at His Table.

Consider how Jesus brings this full circle: in the parable, Lazarus longed to eat what fell from the table, just as a dog eats the crumbs that fall from their master's table. We *know* that image because it visualizes the Greek word for true worship – proksyneo – to beg like a dog... and, where does that begging happen? At the table of the master. And yet, though we be beggars all, Lazaruses all, we beg with confidence, because our master knows us, loves us, cares for us and binds our sores, and makes us to recline with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob the blest at the feast of salvation. Remember *that* image from *weeks* ago... and know we've, in a sense, come full circle to it again.

We need not fear missing out on the feast because of stubborn self-righteousness. We can be content being the penitent beggars that we are, having been called to safety, rescued and named by Christ, given a place at His Table, and having the same inheritance described of Lazarus in life everlasting: "But *now*," Abraham says in the parable, "*Now*" (after all Lazarus' affliction, all his cross-bearing, all his beggarliness having been answered with forgiveness and divine rescue)... "*now*, he is comforted here." *That* is the inheritance that awaits you.

In the Name of the Father
And of the Son
And of the Holy Spirit.
+ AMEN +

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