

The First Sunday after Trinity

2 June, Anno Domini 2024

St. Luke 16:19-31

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

Children of God,

There are many things to learn from our Lord's account of the rich man and Lazarus. Today let's focus our attention on what our Lord teaches us about Holy Scripture so that we might apply ourselves to studying Scripture with all diligence and receive its many blessings.

The utter foolishness and unbelief of the rich man even as he is suffering the burning torments of hell are astounding. You would think that beholding Lazarus resting peacefully in the arms of Abraham, the rich man would finally understand and at least acknowledge the truth. The audacity to seek mercy from the man from whom he withheld even crumbs from his sumptuous feasting.

But perhaps even more striking is his continued rejection of the sufficiency of God's Word, the testimony of the prophets of God written down by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Only sinful man could be so foolish as to think that the Word of God has less power to convert sinners than the word of someone from the dead. "No, father Abraham. God's Word isn't enough. You can't simply expect us to change literally everything about our life just because God said. We need proof. We need a sign. We need miracles and ghosts. We need healings and tongues. Those would be enough. We will believe God if He does those things for us."

Turn in your hymnals to page 323. Let's read together the 3rd Article of the Apostles' Creed. "I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen." And just a few minutes ago you confessed faith in the

Holy Spirit, “the Lord and Giver of life...who spoke by the prophets.” We believe, teach, and confess, that it is through the speaking of the Church as She proclaims the whole counsel of the Word of God that the Holy Spirit does His work of sanctifying us, converting us from unbelief, declaring sinners to be holy on account of the forgiving Blood of Jesus, and bringing forth holy works of love.

Let us now read Dr. Luther’s explanation to the 3rd Article. “I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith. In the same way He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith.” Let’s stop there.

It is the Gospel which is proclaimed to us that creates faith in the same Gospel. As St. Paul writes in Romans chapter 10 “Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of Christ...How can they believe if they have not heard?” Faith, trust, hope. These are born of being certain of the truthfulness of a claim. If I promised you that this week each of you was going to win a million dollars in the lottery, you would have no certainty that that claim was true. You would be right to be skeptical. You would have nothing upon which to build your hope.

It is another thing entirely when the God of heaven and earth, who cannot lie and with whom there is no shadow or variation due to change, promises something. When the Triune God promises something it is as good as already done. When he promised aged and barren Abram that he would have a blood son and that his offspring would be as numerous as the stars of the heavens, there was absolutely no question as to whether or not that would be the case. Abram knew the character and nature of God because it had been proclaimed to him. Thus Abram believed not simply the promise but God Himself. God’s Word was sufficient.

God’s Word, unlike man’s, actually causes what it says. It is sometimes referred to as performative speech. God said “Let there be light” and immediately where there was once nothing, there was light. There wasn’t an option for there not to be light

once God had spoken it. St. Paul writes “The Word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword.” (Heb. 4:12)

In the same way, like father Abraham, our faith in the Word of God is created by the Holy Spirit through the Word of God. In the Bible, God Himself tells us who He is and what He has done. We hear of His great mercy toward sinners, that He delights in our salvation, and that He has given His only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ, to pay the full atoning price for our sin by His death.

There are several important terms that we use in describing the Bible that are essential for our certainty. First, it is inspired by the Holy Spirit. St. Peter writes “...no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone’s own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.” (2 Peter 1:20b-21) The Holy Spirit, in His mercy, caused the authors of Holy Scripture to record all that is necessary for our salvation. He guided not only the content but the very words. It was not a magical process and the writers didn’t go into a trance. Rather the Holy Spirit by His divine power guided the writers in their thinking and caused them to write down all that we need. Thus, St. Paul writes to his student and fellow pastor Timothy “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness...” (2 Timothy 3:14-16) Our whole hope and faith is built on our certainty that everything in the Bible is what God Himself has spoken and not just the words of men.

Because the Bible is inspired, breathed out by God, it is also therefore inerrant. God can neither lie nor make mistakes. Thus, in His Word there are no errors of either content or speech. There are no contradictions as so many like to claim. God cares too much about our salvation to allow for errors.

We also confess the perspicuity or clarity of Scripture. In other words, as the psalmist writes in Psalm 119:105, the Scriptures are “a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.” The Scriptures are perfectly clear and understandable and they bring clarity and understanding. What we find confusing or difficult is only so because

of our sinful nature. God has caused His Word to be conveyed to us in such a way that is understandable to us. This is why it is imperative that we understand the rules of language and grammar. So much false teaching is rooted in a failure to understand how language works. A classic example is the Words of Institution. The simple, clear language of Scripture teaches us that the bread IS the Body of Christ and the wine IS the Blood of Christ. The words and the grammar are clear. The trouble comes when we don't stick with the plain meaning of the words and the grammar of the text. Christ did not err or speak unclearly when He instituted the sacrament. Just consider the fruit of reinterpreting the word "is" in the Words of Institution. The consequence is that something given to create and sustain certainty of Christ's forgiveness becomes a worthless, empty symbol that imparts no certainty to the conscience.

We also confess the perfect unity of Scripture. The God proclaimed by the prophets is not a different God than the one proclaimed by the apostles. There has only ever been one way of salvation established by God. God's people in the time of the Old Testament were looking forward to the Messiah who would make satisfaction for their sin. We in the time of the New Testament are living in light of the fulfillment of that promise in Jesus of Nazareth. No book of the canonical Scriptures proclaims different doctrine than any other. They do not all focus on exactly the same thing but all are united in their teaching and confirm one another. How could they not be when they are all the word of the one true God who is the same yesterday, today, and always? Christ confirms this when, in Luke 24 He says to the apostles "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." (Lk 24:44)

The Scriptures are unified not only because of the unity of author but also because of the unity of the content. All of Scripture is given to teach us the one way of salvation - the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Son of God and the Son of Mary.

Dear Christian, you have been blessed as few Christians before you have to be able

to have easy access to the very Word of God in your home and even in your pocket. For most of history God's people could only go and hear the Scriptures read to them as when King Josiah commanded that the Book of the Covenant be read in the hearing of all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem. (2 Chronicles 34). Or when Ezra the scribe read the Book of Law of Moses to all those who had returned from exile. We read in Nehemiah 8 "And all the people gathered as one man into the square before the Water Gate...So Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly, both men and women and all who could understand what they heard, on the first day of the seventh month...They read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly, and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading." (Nehemiah 8:1a, 2, 8)

You now have both. We can gather here together according to the Third Commandment to hear God's Word read and preached. We can also sit down together and discuss the Scriptures in detail during Bible Class, which I strongly urge each of you make your regular practice. And you can read and talk about those same Scriptures in your homes and at your places of work. We even have the opportunity to be driving down the road while listening to the Scriptures read to us through an app on our phone. How richly blessed are we to have the living Word of God with us wherever we go!

And yet, for all that, Biblical literacy among God's children is astonishingly low. It's as though we have taken it for granted because it is so easily accessed. We hardly know the people and the events of the Old Testament if we have read it at all. Many don't even know the chief parts of the Small Catechism which so beautifully and simply teach the Christian faith. In place of God's Word we have substituted something quite demonic - the idea that God reveals Himself to each of us immediately, apart from the external Word. We have read a little bit of Scripture and so we imagine that we are now experts in all of it and so we think we know what God would say. We extrapolate out in the imaginations of our hearts and then confidently assert that "Thus saith the Lord." We hear phrases such as "God spoke to me" or "My God would never" or "God put it on my heart". These are simply the excuses of the sinful flesh not wanting to deal with the fact that a) we don't

know what Scripture actually says because we can't be bothered to read it and b) we don't like what the Scriptures say. This is called enthusiasm - the idea that God speaks to you apart from His Word.

God has not promised to deal with us in any other way than through His Word - that Word which we read in Holy Scripture, which is proclaimed to us through preaching and teaching, and the Word which God Himself has joined to the Sacraments. If we try to seek God anywhere else we will be never be satisfied because He has not promised to be there. We may try to lie to ourselves but without God's sure Word, there can be no comfort or certainty of salvation.

God has only promised to deal with us through His Word. We return again to Paul's words in Romans "Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of Christ." This is the whole purpose of the Third Commandment. Man doesn't live by food and drink and clothing or wealth or success. We live by the Word of God. So Peter says to Christ "You have the word of eternal life." And Christ Himself says "Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death." (Jhn 8:51)

God's Word which He has preserved for us in the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures is our life and salvation. It is the only sure foundation upon which we can build whereby we can stand with confidence before the judgment seat of Christ on the Last Day.

It is absolutely necessary, not just a good idea, that each of us take up the Word of God daily so that we might be fed and nourished by it. With God's Word we can withstand all of hell's legions, the mockery and persecution of the world, and the temptations that assault us each and every day. It is the absolving word of Jesus that brings peace to our guilt-laden consciences.

Anyone who refuses to pick up the Word of God, study it, hear it, learn it, and be changed by it cannot call himself a Christian. A Christian is one who loves above all other things in this life the word which God speaks and which He has caused to

be written down for our learning. The Scriptures are given to change us, to remake us in the image of God's Son so that we may be pleasing to Him by believing what He has said and living our entire life, every aspect of it, according to what God has said. This is how the name of God is kept holy among us as we pray in the Lord's Prayer. We hallow God's Name when we teach the word of God in all its truth and purity and as His dear children lead holy lives according to it.

Parents, this is your first and highest calling regarding your children - to feed them with the Word of God. Daily fill their ears with it. Read the Bible together every day. "Talk about it when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise." (Deut. 6:7) Work with them to commit as much of the Bible and the Small Catechism to memory as you possibly can so that that living and active word can constantly be active in all of you. Do not be like the rich man who had the Scriptures and certainly would have considered himself to be a godly man but who gave the Word of God only lip service. Orient every facet of your life around the Word as you prepare yourselves and your family to receive Christ with joy when He comes again on the clouds. Arm yourself with the strong Word of God so that you may stand in the day of battle and not be overthrown.

God grant that each of us would devote ourselves to His sacred Word so that there is nothing in the world more precious to us than the Word of our God which is life and truth. And may that word bear much fruit in our midst that we may emboldened to speak with great joy and confidence of Christ our Savior so that He may continue His gracious work of calling to faith by the Gospel and enlarging His Church.

In the Name of +Jesus.

Pastor Ulmer

(We stand.) The peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and

your minds in Christ Jesus.