

The First Sunday after Holy Trinity

22 June, Anno Domini 2025

St. Luke 16:19-31

People of God,

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

I find it quite common among God's people, including myself, that we academically understand Jesus' words "Whoever would be My disciple must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me", but we only think of it abstractly, almost imagining that somehow WE will be able to make through this life as Christians without suffering, not real suffering at least. Or perhaps what we actually don't like is that we don't get to pick what the crosses are, when they come, or when they will end. We want to maintain control over our suffering so that it isn't too much or too inconvenient. I'm sure Lazarus would have gladly chosen crosses other than having to beg for food or being covered in oozing sores all over his body.

"O Lord, couldn't my finances just be a little tight? Couldn't I just have some kind of simple illness that a little medicine could fix rather than this terminal disease?" Most certainly Lazarus was constantly lamenting his misery to God. Not a day would have gone by that Lazarus didn't cry out to God asking for relief. "How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long must I have sorrow in my heart daily?" Day after day. Week after week. Year after year.

And to make it even worse, he couldn't even get crumbs from the rich man who most certainly had enough. The rich man could have invited Lazarus in and given him a share in the feast. He could have cleaned up Lazarus' wounds and given the poor man a place to rest. This son of Abraham who was in synagogue every Sabbath, who certainly tithed very dutifully, who had received countless earthly blessings from God allowed Lazarus to languish at his gate. He either presumed

that Lazarus deserved his suffering or He was so busy enjoying his things that he couldn't be bothered to even notice Lazarus (though in hell, he certainly betrayed that he knew exactly who Lazarus was).

Would anyone be surprised if Lazarus began to believe himself that God had rejected him? That maybe he had been cast out of God's kingdom for his sin? Have you not thought the same thing in the midst of your pain, your suffering, and your sadness? Have we not all understood our suffering as God's rejection of us? And, conversely, have we not all assumed that God was pleased with us simply because we were living comfortably and without trial?

Part of the problem is that we start with a false assumption and maybe we don't even recognize it. We assume that we should have basically a good life, only occasionally punctuated by sorrow and suffering. We expect health, money, good weather, peace, a working air conditioner, options for dinner, a house with a room for everyone and then a few extras, jobs that are fulfilling. But why should we expect any of these things? Have we done something to deserve them? Do we believe that we are basically good people who should get to live a life more like the rich man than Lazarus? The truth is that is exactly what our flesh thinks. It's why, when even minor inconveniences strike, let alone truly heavy crosses, we are shocked, we panic, we worry, we grumble, we get angry. We forget that "All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." And not just a little bit. We are poor, miserable, wretched sinners. Should the full depth of our sin and rebellion against God be revealed to us, we would immediately fall into absolute despair. We, in a way by God's grace (which is why we need reminding), lose sight of the fact that we don't deserve even a single drop of cool water on our tongues from God, let alone full water bottles clinking with cold ice at a moment's notice. Are you shocked that nations are rising against nation, that neighbor hates neighbor, that lawlessness and violence fill our streets? Are you stunned that at the millions of people who bow down before false christs and listen to the lying tongues of their false prophets? Are you surprised when even Christian brothers and sisters turn on one another, talk about each other behind one another's backs, and try to ignore one another?

Why? Have you forgotten what the Scripture says of all people? “There is no one who does good. No, not one.” That includes each of us gathered here today. Truly it is a miracle that there is anything good ever. It is only by God’s completely undeserved grace that the whole world isn’t constantly ravaged by war, by disease, by natural disasters, by famine and drought. If God were dealing with us as our flesh so often imagines, that is, according to what we deserve, I shudder to imagine what misery would cover this planet. It is astounding that we enjoy any good at all, let alone pantries full of food (which millions of people around the world don’t), times of relative peace (which we know well millions of people do not), any measure of health, let alone luxuries like cars, dishwashers, vacations, retirement accounts, sports, and an endless list of others.

Dear brothers and sisters, the account of the rich man and Lazarus is meant to snap us out of our slumber. While we may have grown so accustomed to the shocking reversal of roles for the rich man and Lazarus, our flesh still recoils at the thought that we should have to take our place in this life with Lazarus, that we should have to suffer...deeply and painfully, especially as those who bear the name of Jesus. Notice that Lazarus wasn’t being persecuted or sneered at by pagans because he was proclaiming faith in Jesus. A disease attacked his body and he had no means by which to take care of himself. Wealth and health, two the most common idols of man and Lazarus had neither. Lazarus was rejected by sons of Abraham who esteemed him not, despised and rejected him and assumed that God had done the same. The devil simply hates the prospect of anyone having any good thing, especially if they confess the true faith.

Of course, the point is not that wealth is inherently evil nor that only if you suffer as Lazarus did are you able to be carried to Abraham’s bosom. Rather, Lazarus is a type of those who hunger and thirst for righteousness above all else, whose hearts are not set on earthly treasures whether they have them or not, those whose trust is alone in the rich mercy of God in Christ Jesus. Lazarus was completely dependent upon mercy for survival. That is to be the heart of every Christian whether they have received the riches of Solomon or cannot find two pennies to rub together.

Every Christian recognizes that he is a beggar before the God of heaven and earth. Not a single one of us has a claim on anything - our life, our wealth, and, above all else, our salvation. We are to take neither pride nor credit for anything we have because we know that we deserve none of it and we are to be eager to find ways to share whatever we have with anyone else in need, especially those of the household of faith. We are to take no stock in comfort or discomfort because neither of them tell us anything about God's mercy in Christ. Only the cross, the empty tomb, the Scriptures, the font, and the Holy Supper can assure us of God's love, His promises, and the forgiveness of all our sins. These are our treasures and they are completely independent of how much money we have, how healthy we are, who likes us, or the depth and difficulty of our earthly struggles.

This the source of our rejoicing. We know that every good we receive is a gift of God's mercy, completely undeserved. Whether it is relief from our aches and pains, a miraculous healing, a new job, a cup of coffee, or the great joy of gathering in the house of our God to receive from His merciful hand the free gifts of eternal life and salvation - all of them are worthy of our constant praise. And even the sufferings we endure with Lazarus we know with absolute certainty are not only not bad (though they certainly feel that way), but are actually good. Our Father disciplines and trains those whom He loves. And we know that training and discipline are hard. Crosses are heavy. But these things have purpose. They remind us of our dependence on God's mercy. They remind us that He alone is our good and can provide for us. They remind us that the things of this world are temporary and fading away and cannot be a source of comfort and peace for us. So, dearly beloved of God, you can even rejoice in your suffering because you know "No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 8:37-39)

God grant that the good of our hearts would not be the things of this world, that

instead our hearts may only always be fixed where true joys are to be found - in Christ Jesus our Lord.

In the Name of +Jesus.

Pastor Ulmer

(We stand.) The peace of God which passes all human understanding keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus our Lord.