

Many members. One body united in Christ.

The First Sunday after Trinity

St. Luke 16:19-31

7 June, Anno Domini 2026

Beloved recipients of the Heavenly Father's abundant mercy,

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

“If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen.” (1 John 4:20)

Now I have a suspicion that the rich man would never say “I hate Lazarus.” Indeed, there were probably a lot of people whom the rich man was happy to help and receive at his table. The rich man was probably well-liked and respected by many around him. And he was probably never for want of an invitation to dine in the homes of others. The rich man couldn't plead ignorance. He knew who Lazarus was. But, maybe the rich man believed there was some reason that he shouldn't help Lazarus. If you asked him, he likely would have come up with some very reasonable sounding excuse why the wretched beggar covered in sores shouldn't receive help or even just a moment of relief. We should know because we've made the same empty excuses - “Lazarus could try to get a job. Lazarus will probably just abuse whatever help he receives and buy drugs or booze. Lazarus got himself into that mess and I wouldn't be helping him if I just handed him money. He needs to learn to take care of himself and not just live on handouts from other people. I can't really afford it.” The list goes on. We invent every excuse under the sun as to why we can't or even shouldn't help the Lazarus' that are laying all around us. And it's not hard to get others to agree because they don't want to help either.

But God is not fooled by the rich man or by us. Even if there is some truth to the excuse, you still cannot turn your back on or pretend to ignore your brother in need, especially those within the household of faith, and still claim to love God. You cannot see them suffering or struggling and refuse aid or encouragement while at the same time praying that God would help you in the midst of your own needs. Are you faithful with everything the Lord has freely given you? You can't lay hold of your neighbor's mental or physical or spiritual weaknesses and imperfections and beat them over the head with them or elevate yourself in your own or others eyes while praying to God that He would forgive your trespasses and not deal with you according to what you deserve. Would you want the Lord to demand

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a fitness or purity test to determine what forgiveness you deserve?

Love, true love, always comes with a cost, a very high cost - yourself. If you are a husband, everything you are and have is pressed into providing both temporal and eternal good to your wife. If you are a wife, you order yourself under the headship and authority of your husband and entrust yourself to his love. If you are a ruler, you lay aside personal ambition in order to protect those under your rule. Such love doesn't seek the good of others only when there is the opportunity for repayment or because they have earned it. True love doesn't concern itself with the cost and isn't interested in reward. And such love simply can't exist outside of faith in Christ because only in Christ can we know such love and only by Christ are we set free to show such love.

Christ is the key to perfect love because the love of Christ which led Him to sacrifice His very life to atone for the sins of the world, sets us free from death and from the fear of God's wrath and judgment. Without His Blood, we are left to find some other way to pay for our sins. Without His Blood, we stand hopelessly guilty before God. We can only try desperately to rack up enough "good works" to tip the scale in our favor. Our neighbor is no longer the object of our love but a means to an end that can be discarded when no longer needed. When we have sufficiently convinced ourselves and others that we are good people, then we no longer need to concern ourselves with the Lazarus' of the world because they can't gain us anything more. What is it to us if they suffer and die?

Thanks be to God that His love is not rooted in our worthiness or goodness. If it was, we would receive no love from God at all. No, God's love is rooted in Himself and His goodness. It is precisely because He IS love that "while we were yet sinners Christ died for us." He died BECAUSE we were unworthy and hopeless and helpless, dead in our sin and our trespasses. He died because He didn't want us to receive exactly what we deserve - eternity with the rich man in the torment of everlasting judgment. He didn't want the rich man to suffer that torment but the rich man believed he didn't need mercy from God, as evidenced by the fact that he wouldn't show mercy to unworthy Lazarus.

Make no mistake about it. However you try to sugar coat it or explain it away, you simply cannot love God and at the same time turn up your nose at your neighbor in his need. It doesn't matter if it's because you actually have a beef with your neighbor or because you are just trying to keep what's yours. It's all the same. It's all a denial and rejection of the mercy and love you want God to show you. Have you

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done anything to deserve those things from God? Have you proven yourself worthy of them?

While it is certainly true that loving our neighbor doesn't save us, it is just as true that not loving our neighbor condemns us because hating our neighbor and refusing to show him mercy stems from an unbelieving heart that neither seeks nor receives God's mercy in Christ Jesus. That is what our Lord is teaching us through the account of Lazarus and the rich man. The rich man isn't in hell because he didn't love Lazarus or give him food from his sumptuous feasts. The rich man is in hell because he denied his own need for mercy from God and therefore he rejected the Christ of whom Moses and the prophets preached. His hatred of Lazarus was merely the outward evidence and fruit of that.

All who by the grace of the Holy Spirit listen to the Ten Commandments in faith can come to only one conclusion - "These I have not kept. I have sinned and the only just wages of sin is my death temporally and eternally. I have no excuse nor is there anything to offer to God in payment. I have not let God's love have its way with me and so my love for others has failed. There are those whom I have hurt and those whom I have failed to help. Though I have the wealth of the whole world, though everyone around me thinks highly of me, though I have everything put together, still, I am a filthy, miserable, wicked beggar before the throne of God. My only hope is that God would mercifully pardon me all my sins and not count them against me for the sake of His Son who willingly left the riches and glory of His eternal kingdom to be clothed in my flesh, to bear my sin, and to suffer my death."

Such faith is the faith that saves because it believes not in itself but in that which God has declared in Holy Scripture, that all who believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world and so receive the baptism of regeneration and renewal which He instituted will be saved. In the baptismal waters all our lovelessness is covered by the love of Christ, all our merciless hatred of our neighbor is drowned by the mercy of Christ. What is more, this day He invites you to feast on the riches of His mercy by feasting on Him - the very Body and Blood which were sacrificed in your stead so that you might no longer live in the fear of God's wrath and the terror of eternal damnation. The Son of God has set you free. By His mercy He gathers up all the Lazarus' who lay at His gates seeking crumbs and gives to us instead the seats of sons and heirs of His gracious kingdom.

Having thus received such boundless and undeserved mercy, what complete madness it is if we continue on as the rich man, ignoring any who stand in need of our

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mercy - be that daily bread, encouragement in Christ, or the forgiveness of sins? Each of us must heed this warning from Christ and examine how we have treated our brothers and sisters who have stood in need of our mercy (which, by the way, is undeserved by its very nature). Have we spoken unkindly or even cruelly? Have we sought to put others in their place while assuming our own superiority? Are we turning a blind eye to one another's needs or even hoping that we don't learn about them so that we can plead ignorance? Are we holding grudges or showing impatience to those who don't live up to our expectations? Do not be fooled. God will not be mocked. As He saw the hearts of Lazarus and the rich man, so does He see ours.

God grant us true repentance and fill us with the love and mercy of Christ so that we might be filled with true love and mercy for one another.

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.