

The First Sunday after Trinity
Sunday, June 6, 2021
Luke 16:19–31

My opening story is not meant to be a joke but a way to make a point. Moses, Elijah, and Abraham walk into a bar. The bartender says, “Gentlemen, what’ll it be?” They respond in unison, “Jesus.”

These three men are of course three of the great fathers in the faith of the Old Testament. They lived well before Jesus and so did not know Him by name. But Moses, Elijah, and Abraham all believed in Jesus. They all knew Him in the sense that their faith was in the baby born of Mary, the man who grew up in Nazareth, the Lord who carried out His ministry in first century Palestine. If Moses, Elijah, and Abraham were to show up here today they would all affirm that our focus in worship is exactly where it ought to be, on Christ Jesus.

All three of these men actually do show up in the Gospel according to Luke. Moses and Elijah with Jesus on the mount of transfiguration, Abraham in the story that Jesus tells in today’s Gospel reading. The reason these three Old Testament saints appear in the ministry of Jesus is to show that the entire Old Testament points us to Jesus. If they did not know Him by name, they did know Him by who He was. They believed God’s promise of the Messiah, the Savior for sin. Jesus was born as this Messiah, this Savior. God made this promise to Abraham. Moses and Elijah proclaimed this promise. That is the central message of the Old Testament.

In the Gospel reading Jesus tells a story of the poor man Lazarus and the rich man. When Lazarus dies he is carried by the angels to heaven where he is at Abraham’s side. When the rich man dies he is buried and ends up in hell. Why does Lazarus go to heaven and the rich man to hell? Is it because Lazarus was poor and had nothing in this life but misery? Is it because the rich man had everything and abundant pleasure in this life? No. Lazarus went to heaven because he believed the very same thing Abraham and Moses and Elijah believed. They believed in the Savior God promised, and that is Jesus.

The rich man on the other hand did not believe in Jesus. He had another god. His god was his possessions and his life of pleasure. When he is in hell he looks up and sees Abraham. Father Abraham, have mercy on me. In his life the rich man had no regard for the promise made to Abraham of the Savior. The rich man saw no need for a Savior. But now in his eternal suffering he wishes for mercy. But there is no mercy for those who have rejected Christ and are now in hell for eternity. The rich man then turns his sight toward his brothers. They also do not believe in Jesus. If only Lazarus would go to them from the dead then they would repent, the rich man insists. But Abraham tells the rich man that they have Moses and the Prophets. That is, they have the Bible. That is all they need.

But that’s what the rich man had also, wasn’t it? He had the Bible and yet did not believe. That is because his pleasure and lavish lifestyle was his god. The rich man’s brothers will have the

same view toward the Word of God. The rich man appeals to Abraham they won't believe in the Bible but they will believe if someone comes to them from the dead. Abraham says if they do not believe the Bible they won't be convinced even if someone should rise from the dead.

Some would like a clear display from God so that they may believe. But we see from the Bible that there is nothing so clear that some people will continue to reject Christ. Jesus Himself rose from the dead and yet there were still people who did not believe in Him. We have the written Word of God. This is what He has given to us. And if the Old Testament was enough for those who lived before Christ how much more is the Old Testament along with the New Testament enough for us who have lived since Jesus was on the earth?

The story Jesus tells is to make it clear that there is salvation in Him alone. The difference between Lazarus who was poor and the rich man isn't what they had in this life. It was faith. Lazarus believed in Jesus, the rich man rejected Jesus. Their differences are significant. It's worth noting how they were the same. They were both sinners. They both had the Word of God. Jesus suffered on the cross for everyone. Despite his miserable life Lazarus saw beyond it. He clung to the promise first made to Abraham. The promise declared by Moses and the prophets. He had only misery in this life and still saw his sin and his need for salvation. He saw his salvation in Christ alone.

The rich man saw only the need for feeding his own pleasure. In the Epistle reading John talks about how we are not able to see God. But we are able to see the people in our lives. How can we say we love God whom we have not seen if we do not love others who we do see? The rich man saw only himself, not the poor man at his gate who was in need. Lazarus was not even asking for a seat at the table. He longed for the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table. But the rich man ignored Lazarus. It was only in hell that he saw that the good he sought in his life was worth nothing.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, do not look where God has not pointed you to. He has given you the Bible. The Bible points you to Jesus. There is nothing the world can offer that will give you what you truly need. No possessions. No pleasure. You need salvation. You need to be forgiven of your sins. You will find forgiveness and you have received salvation in Christ alone. It is not wrong to have possessions in this life. It's not wrong to enjoy life. God Himself has given us the things we own and gives them to us to enjoy. But when we look to those things for what we think we need then we reject God and the salvation He gives us in Christ. When we revel in them and ignore those in our lives who are in need we are not loving God. Even if we have very little in this life, or we suffer much misery, we have everything because we have Christ.

Your identity is not in what you have in this life. You are a child of God, you have been baptized into Christ. You may have many possessions or you may long to have more possessions, but you are welcomed by your Lord to feast at His eternal banquet. He is the Lord of all and gave up everything. He offered up His very life, sacrificing Himself for everyone. His

very body He gave over on the cross He gives to you to sustain you. The blood which streamed from His side He gives to you to drink to quench your thirst when you are suffering and miserable. In these things we see that what we need is Christ and He is who we have. Amen.

SDG

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Lutheran Service Book Lectionary: One-Year, Gospel

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