

The Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost
October 3, 2010
Amazing Grace Lutheran Church - Pastor Chip Wilke

Luke 16:19-31

"There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores. The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. So he called to him, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.' 'But Abraham replied, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.' 'He answered, 'Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my father's house, for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.' 'Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.' 'No, father Abraham,' he said, 'but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.' 'He said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.'" (NIV)

Do you consider yourself to be rich? Who are some people that you would consider rich? What is it that makes a person wealthy in your eyes? What is it that makes for a good life? Is it having the most money and possessions? Is it having the best education or job? Is it having the most power or fame? Is it having the best health? Is it having the most friends? Does having the biggest or closest family make a person rich? Why would we look at someone and say: *"now that person has a good life"*? Today, I pray that our eyes are open to see the truth about: **What makes a person really rich?**

Before we jump into this text it is helpful to review the context. Earlier in this chapter Jesus taught about the importance of being trustworthy in handling worldly wealth. He said to manage our blessings so that we will be welcomed into eternal dwellings. Jesus emphasized that we cannot serve both God and money. But we are told *"the Pharisees, who loved money, heard all this and were sneering at Jesus."* (vs. 14) So Jesus tells what has become one of the most well known stories - a story of two men - a story often referred to as the account of: *The Rich Man and Poor Lazarus*.

Jesus teaches, *"There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day."* Can you picture this man? We are not given his name but are told he wore the best of clothes every day. Purple was the color of royalty because purple dye came from shellfish and each shellfish would only produce a few drops making any type of purple cloth extremely expensive. Not only did this man wear the best, he was also able to feast on the choicest of foods and the best of drinks every day. Anyone would love to be a guest at the banquet table in his mansion. In summary,

this man lived it up - a life of luxury. He had plenty of disposable income to say the least and he loved to show it off and enjoy all the best this world had to offer him.

Then there is another man. ***“At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores.”*** We are introduced to Lazarus - a beggar. The name Lazarus means *“God is my help.”* A simple trust in God is really all this beggar had in his life. He was dropped off at this rich man's gate where he longed to just eat any scraps that would fall from the rich man's table. But it appears Lazarus got more attention from the dogs than from the rich man. The dogs came and licked sick Lazarus' painful sores. Each day people just unloaded this poor man at this rich man's gate as though he were an unwelcome burden. We don't hear of any friends, or anybody for that matter, coming to his aide. Physically speaking this man had nothing. He had bad health, no money or possessions, no ability to provide a better life for himself, no friends or family to help.

So which of these two had a good life? Which of these men would we say was really rich? In life on earth one had possessions, money, and all his heart desired. The other basically had nothing this world had to offer. One lived in luxury, the other struggled to just live. If we saw these two today I think I know, and I believe Jesus knew, what most of us would think and say about what makes a person really rich? But, dear friends, we would be looking at all the wrong things.

That is why Jesus expands our horizons and allows us to see the bigger picture this morning. He takes our eyes off of the just here and now and allows us to view things from a perspective of eternity. ***“The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried.”*** Whether you have the most money of all or none at all, death still one day comes knocking at the door. It is no surprise that poor, sick Lazarus died and I wonder how many people even noticed. Yet, eventually the same thing happened to the man who enjoyed living in luxury every day. We are told he was buried and we can only imagine the kind of showy funeral his great wealth was able to buy him.

But let us compare these two men now. Lazarus who had no servant to help him on earth, is carried immediately by powerful servants of God. Angels come to get him. And where do they take poor Lazarus? They bring him to the side of Abraham - known as the father of all believers. They bring him to a place where he is comforted. They bring Lazarus to a home where all his troubles and pain and sorrows are over forever. They bring him to a mansion where he will never hunger or thirst, and where every tear will be wiped from his eyes. In short, Lazarus is taken to heaven.

The rich man on the other hand is taken to the only other option there is - the place prepared for the devil and his angels. He is cast from God's presence in hell - a place of eternal agony and torment. All we have to do is listen to this conversation to learn a few things about hell. The rich man ***“looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. So he called to him, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.' 'But Abraham replied, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.'*** Do you understand what hell is like? Hell is terrible and it is

eternal. It is a real place of everlasting torture and suffering. There is no getting out of hell - ever.

What a reversal of fortunes! Now who would we say had a good life? This rich man found out that it was poor Lazarus and not him who was really rich in life and now in death. Lazarus had the far better life because he had a relationship with the one true God. Through faith in Jesus, Lazarus was one of God's beloved children. The rich man was not. He only had a bunch of things, temporary things, for himself. He was not rich toward God or his neighbor. When we stretch things out into eternity, when it comes to who was really rich, it is no contest! Lazarus' suffering was light and momentary and his comfort and pleasures will be eternal. The rich man had a chance to life it up for himself for 80-90 years, maybe more if he had the strength, but would go on to an eternity of torment and agony.

I'm not sure who said this but I know that someone once said: *"It's too bad that dying is the last thing we do, because it could teach us so much about living."* When the rich man found out it was too late for him he pleaded for his family back home. He didn't want them to die without faith in Jesus and end up in eternal agony with him. So his solution was to send Lazarus back from the dead to warn them. ***"Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.'*** Abraham says that God has already provided them with what they need. They had His Word. They had a message of law and Gospel, sin and grace. They had the Scriptures that testified about Jesus.

Yet, this rich man still didn't quite get it, did he? He basically says, *"No, that is not enough! They need more than just God's Word. If someone miraculously comes back from the dead that will convince them and they will repent. The Word just won't do!"* But again Abraham says: ***'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.'*** Abraham is saying God's Word is sufficient for them and if they don't listen to the Word not even a miracle will change that. If we don't believe what Abraham is saying perhaps we have forgotten about another Lazarus, the brother of Mary and Martha, whom Jesus did bring back from the dead. Did it cause most of the Pharisees to believe in Him? Not at all. Instead, they plotted more earnestly to kill Jesus. If we do not believe what Abraham tells this rich man perhaps we are not thinking about the biggest resurrection of all on the third day. Did that cause Jesus' enemies to repent? No, they made up a story of how Jesus' body was stolen. If they do not listen to God's Word, ***"they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead."***

So what does all this mean for you and me today? What can we learn from Jesus? I pray we never sneer at or ignore Jesus when He warns us about loving money and setting our hearts on the things of this world. I pray we repent of our sins for all the times we are selfish, self seeking, and worldly minded. Then I pray we listen to His Word that points us to the Savior who never chased worldly wealth or fame for Himself. Jesus kept His life free from the love of money and was perfectly content. Jesus also suffered and died on the cross to pay for our lack of contentment - to pay for our greed - to pay for our love of money - to pay for all our sins. Jesus made the ultimate sacrifice and defeated even death so that we can live the good life.

What I pray we learn most of all today in this account of the rich man and Lazarus is the truth about what makes a person really rich - in life - in death. When I look around

in here do you know what I see? The richest people in the world! ***“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich” (2 Corinthians 8).*** I consider myself to be the richest of all because by grace I am God’s own child. Through water and the Word I have been clothed in the best clothes of all it get to wear each day - the righteousness of Jesus. Every day I am fed with food and drink far better than anything I could have to nourish my body because I have the best of all - the living Word.

We are rich dear friends because we belong to church body that recognizes the greatest treasure God has given to us is His Holy Word. That’s why we want to hold onto to all of it and teach and preach it faithfully. God’s Word may not tell us everything or even certain things we may want to know, but it tells us all we need to know. It is sufficient for us. May we listen to His Word for it prepares us for life here and eternally. In this Word is riches greater than any gold or silver for in it is the gospel - the good news about Jesus. Our Savior, and Him alone, makes us the richest people of all. Amen.