

**Shepherd of the Springs Lutheran Church
First Sunday after Trinity**

Text: Luke 16: 19-31

Theme: The Miracle of Repentance - Spiritually Rising from the Dead

If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded if someone rises from the dead. (vs. 31)

Let's begin with a little background on the telling of this parable. As we have noted before, Jesus engaged parables in His teaching of crowds as a form of judgment on unbelief so that hearing they might not understand. Nevertheless, there is not much to the meaning in this parable that is obscure or couched in some kind of clever riddle. The point is right out there for all to understand. Here in the 16th chapter of Luke, Jesus engaged the Pharisees over the question of being in the service of wealth or God. The Pharisees had ridiculed Jesus statement that you cannot make both God and your wealth your master. When you serve one of them, the other will necessarily be despised. Many were lovers of wealth who coveted the standing it brought them in the world, but Jesus declared that whatever we might covet in this world is an abomination to God. (vs. 15) All of the preaching about the coming of the Kingdom of God by Jesus was not to be construed as some kind of relaxation or canceling of the demands for righteousness before God as the Law and the prophets clearly taught. It would be *easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one dot of the Law to become void.* (vs.16). And on making that point to the Pharisees, Jesus tells the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus.

When ultimate trust is put in worldly wealth, there is no room for right devotion to God. Those who are seen as winners in this world - those who think they have it made on account of their wealth - they end up in Hell greatly disappointed. Consensus losers, like poor Lazarus in the parable, end up with the riches of the Kingdom, and they having great conversations with the saints of old, like even the Father of Faith, Abraham himself. If you are committed to overcoming your lostness by lusting for the riches of this world - whether you actually get them *or not*, it doesn't matter - you will be disappointed in the life to come. If you seek the riches of God's mercy to cover the poverty of your lostness, you will gain the riches of God's favor and the fullness of His Kingdom. The winners of the world receive judgment, the losers receive grace. The point of the parable is as simple as that.

The question to be posed by this parable, however, is this: How do we know this? How do we know that ultimate trust in worldly wealth will end in disaster when it comes to heavenly habitations? Jesus points in the parable to the sufficiency of Moses and the Prophets for a right understanding concerning where our priorities must be in order to be righteous before God. What they say cannot be abridged or fudged on these matters. And . . . the most central message of Moses in the Law is that your life must order all of your loves and concerns around a love of God with all your heart,

mind, and soul. The first Commandment must be in command in your life. It cannot occupy any other place; it cannot have any competition from anything in this world. If your wealth is your greatest concern in this life, you may well obtain it and all that it can bring you in this life. But concerning the Kingdom of God, such devotion will be a major disappointment. The riches of this world have incredible power to make you poor in the things of God. On the other hand, poverty in this world does not in its own right make you righteous before God, but it can help you escape making wealth your idol. How are we supposed to make sense out of all of this? Let's explore the parable for clarification.

Is there any kind of hope for those who are seeking to become secure in worldly riches, power, or fame? Common thinking has believed that God could really make a difference with those who are misguided in their priorities about their wealth if he presented miraculous demonstrations of His presence and power. Such is the thinking of the rich man in Hell who begs Father Abraham to have the old beggar, Lazarus, return from the dead and warn his brothers about torments of Hell. He thinks that if his brothers can just personally witness the power of the Lord in raising poor Lazarus, they will be persuaded to repent. But Abraham knows better. *If they will not listen to Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded of someone rises from the dead.* Can miraculous displays by God produce repentance? Let's note the record the mighty acts of God and their impact. Despite all the witnessed miracles in Egypt, the children of Israel wailed before the advancing Egyptian army with their backs to the Red Sea. They complained in the wilderness and when they had the chance, they engaged in more meaningful worship with a golden calf. Within hours of witnessing the miraculous fireballs from heaven on Mt. Carmel, the Israelites at Ahab's urging were out to kill Elijah and return to Baal worship. And what of the crowds who had witnessed so many of Jesus' miracles? They had either abandoned him or they became part of that great multitude in Jerusalem that shouted to Pilate, *crucify him!*

We are told that the rich man in Hell is convinced that his brothers will join him there unless they have a change of heart about the kind of people they are and how they have been living. He believes that his brothers need to repent and on that point he is right. Repentance is needed by his brothers and the rich man knows it. But what is it that they must repent of? The clear understanding is that they must repent of the same ultimate devotion to worldly wealth and standing that characterized his own earthly living. It all comes down to this question for us as well. What is your greatest concern in life to which you are devoted for your ultimate well-being? Is it the eternal God Who is Creator and Redeemer, or is it something of this world - an idol that you can acquire and control for worldly ease and pleasure? Which of us can stand before God and truthfully say: *We have been living our lives always making our love and devotion to you above any worldly wealth or concerns?* And if we cannot say that in all honesty, what do we think that God is going to say to us? Father Abraham in the parable understands that God's demand is for us to repent of our idolatry and trust in

the mercy and forgiveness of our Lord. There is no other way.

There is no direct move that can be made from the idolatry of mammon - the god of worldly riches - and the graciousness of God in Christ. Witnessing a miracle; yes even a resurrection from the dead, will not overcome rebellious idolatry. Those who are unrepentant, dead in their trespasses - they do not need *to witness* a miracle - they need supernatural intervention in their own lives. They have a heart of stone and they need a miracle to have it turned into a heart of flesh -- a heart that is soft where the saving Word of the Gospel can be planted. The note of hope for those seeking salvation through their own worldly means is that Moses and the Prophets have not retired from their ministry. The Church still has, and must claim God's ministry of Law unto repentance. It is the only way in every age and generation whereby the hard hearts of worldly sinners can be made soft for the Gospel. It is the only way that the spiritually impoverished can be taken to Abraham's bosom, outfitted by the riches of God's grace. This is Good News for us who are plagued with an old sinful self that is committed to worldly idols and pursuits. The Law and the prophets present for us God's continual work of repentance by the Law and the sweet Word of God's gracious forgiveness and life in Christ - that we may continually rise from the dead unto newness of life in the grace of Christ, ready to have our own conversations one day with father Abraham.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. A-men.