

## In Nomine Iesu

### The First Sunday after Trinity 2022 We are Beggars, it is True - Luke 16:19-31

“There was a certain rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day. But there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, full of sores, who was laid at his gate, desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man’s table. Moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. So it was that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham’s bosom. The rich man also died and was buried. And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. Then he cried and said, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.’ But Abraham said, ‘Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and you are tormented. And besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us.’ Then he said, ‘I beg you therefore, father, that you would send him to my father’s house, for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment.’ Abraham said to him, ‘They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.’ And he said, ‘No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’ But he said to him, ‘If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead.’”

Grace be to you and peace from God the Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Dear fellow redeemed in Christ:

The Pharisees, who Luke says, were lovers of money, had ridiculed Jesus when He warned them, “You cannot serve God and money.” So, He said to them, “You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God.” He then turned their attention to the “good news of the kingdom of God,” and the unchanging authority of Moses and the Prophets. It was after this exchange that Jesus told them the story of the rich man and Lazarus to show the difference between their way of thinking and the truth of the kingdom of God.

#### I

The rich man, Jesus told His hearers, rejected Moses and the prophets. Even in hell he refused to believe that Moses and the prophets had any more value for his five brothers than it had had for him in life. Shockingly, trust in his own understanding persisted even into hell. Such is the nature of unbelief. Sadly, in this the rich man is like all who will stand at the **left hand** of Christ on Judgment Day. They will insist to the end on being judged by their own standards, asking Christ – “Lord, when did we see You?” (Matthew 25:44) - insisting that He view life as they did, from their perspective. But you know, the supreme irony is that He does see things from their perspective, because He came into the world, took upon Himself our flesh, and experienced life with all of its sorrows, disappointments, sweat, and tears, just as we do. He who will judge everyone on the Last Day knows life **from our side**. But

instead of agreeing with man about life in this fallen world, He told all whom He met what their reward would be if they kept judging according to their own wisdom, and insisting on being judged on their own merits.

Jesus Christ, the chosen Messiah, told His people that Judgment Day was coming; and none would endure because of their spiritual poverty in the sight of God. He offered to give them His own wealth in exchange for their poverty, a wealth earned by His perfect obedience to God's standards and His payment of their sins, of their disobedience. But they refused to believe what He said, even though it agreed with all that Moses and prophets taught. Just as with the rich man, many who heard Him stubbornly trusted in their own understanding. For this reason, Jesus commended the scribes and Pharisees to the fate they chose for themselves by their delusional righteousness in one of the most tragic sentences ever spoken: "They have their reward." (Matthew 6:16) For you see, the reward of self-declared righteousness can never be more than one for this life only, and it never impresses God. All its benefits, all we have earned according to our own standards, must be enjoyed here and, because it will not endure to life everlasting.

Lazarus on the other hand had nothing as far as the rich man could see - if he cared to look. Lazarus longed for what was found unworthy of the rich man's table just to survive, as the dogs licked his sores. But he found no mercy from the rich man, no crumb to assuage his hunger, no drink to cool his tongue, no soothing balm for his repulsive sores, no friendship in his deep loneliness. The world wanted nothing to do with Lazarus, and the rich man found himself in agreement with the world.

But it was Lazarus who found real wealth. He found Living Water for his thirst, the Bread of Heaven for his hunger, the Balm of Gilead for his misery, and Friendship from Him who called Abraham friend. He found a wealth that would endure not just throughout life, but even in death. And he found it in Moses and the prophets. For in them he heard of a Man in far worse condition than himself. There Lazarus was told of One who had everything, yet willingly gave it all up for us, a Man who said, "I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people. All those who see Me laugh Me to scorn; they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, 'He trusted in the LORD, let Him rescue Him; let Him deliver Him, since He delights in Him!'" (Psalm 22:6-8)

## II

In the Holy Scriptures of the Old Testament Lazarus found the promise that there would be a Man condemned for sins He did not commit, a Man who "has no form or comeliness; and when we see Him there is no beauty that we should desire Him. He is despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief ... surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted." (Isaiah 53:2-4) This One would come into the world that treated Lazarus so badly, for the sake of all the world's poor, dying, miserable beggars, however rich or poor, and give Himself over to judgment and condemnation. Just as Isaiah said, "He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed." (Isaiah 53:5) This miserable beggar, suffering beyond measure, would give Himself for the sake of all beggars as Moses and the Prophets

testified: “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, everyone, to his own way; and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.” (Isaiah 53:6)

Lazarus was not too proud to beg, not just from the rich man, but from Him who is rich beyond measure. Lazarus found himself with nothing, begging from Him who “scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts,” from Him who, as a young woman of Nazareth in Lazarus’ own day said, “has put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree. He has filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he has sent away empty ... As he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed forever.” (Luke 1:51-55) This is the One who shines forth from the Old Testament, sharing with His people the rich harvest they did not sow, wine from grapes they did not tend, cities they did not build, grace they did not earn. Lazarus certainly knew in his beggarly, trusting heart what St. Paul would later say plainly to every beggar - every beggar who cared to listen – of the wisdom and mercy far beyond that of any man, “You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.” (2 Corinthians 8:9)

This One, the promised Seed of the woman, the Descendent of Abraham, the Son of David, the Glory of His people Israel and the Light who enlightens the Gentiles, was born the Babe of Bethlehem, Child of Mary, the Savior foreseen and foretold by Moses and the Prophets. It is He who, through His word of grace – **Moses and the Prophets!** – sought and found Lazarus the needy beggar and opened to Him all the treasures of heaven. Dear friends, Lazarus, for all the trouble of his sad and probably short life, now knows perfect joy and peace. The bitterness of his life was seemingly overwhelming, but through it he was sustained by the sure and certain hope God promised for the sake of Him who would come into the world to redeem us all. Now Lazarus’ misery has been replaced by the joy of the heavenly kingdom promised to all whose hope is grounded in the One that Moses and the Prophets foretold, in Him of whom the apostles and evangelists too later testified. Lazarus’ awful, heavy burden was lifted from him as the angels bore him home to heaven, to the promised land Abraham longed to see, and even now sees and is glad.

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On the last day of his life Martin Luther wrote on a small scrap of paper, “We are beggars, it is true.” What sort of words are these? Are they words of a man in pain, incoherent and delusional? Or are they something else? O that God in His abundant grace and wisdom would make us all like Lazarus, helpless, weak, dependent, life hanging by a thread, trusting in nothing but Him, who is rich beyond all measure, satisfied with none other than the Bread of Life, drink none other than wine poured out for the remission of the sins. To borrow from the woman who begged Jesus to save her daughter, would that we all count ourselves dogs who eat the undeserved crumbs that fall from the Master’s table! For of such, dogs and beggars, lost sheep and children, outcasts and sinners, is the Kingdom of God. That is the promise God gave through Moses and the Prophets, the promise that was fulfilled in the hearing of the apostles as they walked with Jesus, in the sight they saw at His crucifixion and His resurrection. That is what sustained the beggar Lazarus. It is yours for the taking, whoever you may be, rich or poor, beggars all. Believe it. Amen.

**Soli Deo Gloria**