

## The eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost

### Text: Luke 16:19 - 31 (NIV)

<sup>19</sup>“There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. <sup>20</sup>At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores <sup>21</sup>and longing to eat what fell from the rich man’s table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores. <sup>22</sup>“The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham’s side. The rich man also died and was buried. <sup>23</sup>In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. <sup>24</sup>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.’ <sup>25</sup>“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. <sup>26</sup>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.’ <sup>27</sup>“He answered, ‘Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my father’s house, <sup>28</sup>for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.’ <sup>29</sup>“Abraham replied, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.’ <sup>30</sup>“No, father Abraham,’ he said, ‘but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.’ <sup>31</sup>“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.’”

### Theme: The Great Chasm

Luke’s Gospel was written for a wealthy man named Theophilus. It’s interesting how much Luke emphasizes Jesus’ warnings against trusting in our wealth and His admonitions to be generous to the poor. Luke begins by reminding us of the poverty of our Lord and His mother. Mary sang in the Magnificat, *“He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty.”* (1:53) When the Lord was born, He was laid in a manger, and when He was presented at the temple the sacrifice was that of the poor. In chapter 6 Luke records Jesus’ Sermon on the Plain. It begins with a series of blessings and woes. The first blessing is, *“Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of heaven.”* The first woe is, *“Woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort.”* Luke alone gives us Jesus’ Parable of the Rich Fool, who built bigger barns and said to himself, *“Take life easy, eat, drink and be merry.”* Jesus tells us that the point is that we are on our guard because our lives do not consist in the abundance of our possessions. It is also only recorded in Luke when Jesus told the rich man not to invite his rich friends to dinner, but the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. Jesus says, *“Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.”* Along with the other Gospels Luke reports about the rich ruler who walked away when Jesus said to sell everything he had and give it to the poor. Jesus went on to say, *“How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God. It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.”* Someone asked, *“Who then can be saved?”* Jesus answered, *“What is impossible with men is possible with God.”* (18:27)

The chapter, however, which deals the most with the chasm between the rich and poor is chapter 16, which has both the parable of the Shrewd Manager and the Rich Man and Lazarus. We see in this parable that one of the greatest chasms, that we have built, is between the rich and the poor. However, Jesus encourages us in these parables to mend this chasm on this earth, that we will not

be on the wrong side of the chasm for all of eternity.

#### I. The rich man built a chasm in this world.

He lived in luxury while a sick beggar was lying right outside his door. Jesus goes to great lengths to describe the wealth of this man. He had the best clothes that money could buy. He was dressed in purple and fine linen. He had a lot of money. He had the best food that money could buy. He had a large home with a gate that kept unwanted people out. He lived in luxury every day.

He also made sure that he knew nothing of the poverty and misery of those who were less fortunate. A beggar named Lazarus was lying right outside of his gate. This poor man was covered with sores. He was also starving. The words “longing to eat” describe his extreme hunger. They are the same words used to describe the prodigal son when he longed to eat the pods that were fed to the pigs. Lazarus would have loved to eat the rich man’s garbage. He was also so weak that he could not even shoo the dogs away that came to lick his sores. The rich man never had any mercy on Lazarus. He probably didn’t even notice him, even though Lazarus was sitting right outside his home. He had built a wall, so that he wouldn’t see any of the misery or poverty around him.

Have we ever put up walls to blind us to the suffering and needs that are around us. How many of us know someone who is struggling? Think of all the things that Lazarus struggled with– hunger, sickness, and weakness. Do you know someone who struggles to put food on the table, someone who struggles to pay for their basic necessities, someone who is sick or weak? Do you know anyone who is in need? It is a big temptation to want to eat, drink, and be merry and to blind ourselves to the needs of people that are very close to us. We don’t have compassion or mercy on them because we would rather not think of it. It is a big temptation to think about me, what I want, how I can enjoy myself, and to put the needs of anyone else out of sight.

We can fall into this temptation no matter how much or how little money that we have. For those who have more money, it is tempting to have as little contact with those who have less, so that you won’t see their need. But people who have less can build these barriers too. It is tempting to use what we have for our pleasures and to forget our children and their needs. It is not uncommon to find parents that spend a lot of money to go out, for electronics, and even drugs and alcohol, and yet their children go to school hungry or without the proper clothing. Do we have mercy on those who depend on us or do we build barriers to keep them and their needs out of sight?

#### II. In eternity there is another chasm, but this one is made by God.

Now the rich man was on the wrong side. It simply says that he died and was buried. His soul was in hell where he was in torment. As Lazarus could look past the gate and see the rich man’s luxuries on earth, the rich man was able to see the joy of heaven, but now he was on the outside. He pleaded for the mercy that he never showed in this life. He was not willing to leave his luxuries for a moment to help Lazarus. Now he wanted Lazarus to leave heaven and go to hell to give him some comfort. But it was impossible. This chasm is created by God to separate the righteous from the unrighteous. The rich man was not sent to hell because he was rich, but because he set his heart on the riches and joys on this world. He never thought about being rich toward God in faith. He never thought about the needs of his fellow man. All that he ever thought of was enjoying each day on this earth to its

fullest. Because he had no faith or love in his heart, God sent him away from His goodness for all of eternity.

That is a harsh penalty, but it is what awaits those who do not desire God's mercy and who do not share God's mercy in this world. There will be an eternal separation from God, His goodness, and all His people. This man was able to see the glory of God and the eternal comfort of His people, but he would never be able to be a part of it.

On the other hand, Lazarus was comforted. His name means "God has helped." He might have been forsaken by man on this earth, but God did not forsake him. God was with Him, even in the midst of his poverty, sickness, and weakness. God was his refuge and strength. When he died, it says that the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The words from our sermon hymn were taken from this verse: "**Lord, let at last Thine angels come, To Abr'ham's bosom bear me home, That I may die unfearing;**" Lazarus was now comforted. He had looked forward to the Lord's help. God did help him. He gave him a share in His eternal peace and glory.

As Christians we confess, "*Our help is in the name of the Lord.*" We trust in Him for the forgiveness of our sins through Jesus Christ and for our salvation. We know that nothing can ever separate us from God's great love in Christ, not even the greatest miseries of life that Lazarus suffered. We cling to God and His mercy for us. We know that the great chasm between God and man can only be mended through Jesus Christ our Savior. While we live on this earth we also strive to share God's mercy with those in need. We share the Gospel to those who need God's forgiveness. We share the material goods, that God has blessed us with, with those who are in need. The Lord fills the hearts of His people with His mercy. Death does bring sadness because for a time it cuts the bonds that we have with loved ones on this earth, but it is not something that we have to fear. God's angels will bear our souls to His glory where we too will be comforted. At the hour of death many of God's people have remarked that they see the angels coming to take them to the Lord. What a blessing it is to know that our riches and inheritance are not in the vain things of this world, but with Christ. He gives us an inheritance that will give everlasting joy.

That is the great divide in this text. We can live for all the joys of this world, and build walls, so we don't even see the suffering around us. In that case we will be on the wrong side of the great chasm that will last for all of eternity. The only way that we can be on the right side of that great chasm is to trust in God's help and mercy for us in Jesus Christ. We trust in His mercy here and look forward to His glory for all of eternity. It is such trust that enables us to be as merciful to each other on this earth as we desire God to be merciful to us for all of eternity.

Amen.

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