

The Sixteenth Sunday After Pentecost – 2022

Amos 6:1-7

1 Timothy 6:6-19

Luke 16:19-31

Lazarus' name means "he whom the Lord helps." You are Lazarus in this place. Clothed only in the sores of your sin you were brought to the font of Holy Baptism. Christ's blood washed you. Jesus is the rich man who became poor with your sin, so that you, through His poverty might become rich (2 Corinthians 8:9). How delighted are you that God thought enough of you to give Himself up into the hands of sinful men? Delighted? Are Christians delighted that they have been saved? Are Christians delighted that they have been redeemed, set free, loved, and cherished by Almighty God? Where is your joy? Do you love your brother? Why... or why not?

Lazarus; he whom the Lord helps. The rich man in the parable was delighted only by what he could consume. Poverty of the heart helps no one. Pride and greed and lust helps no one. Luther described our sinful nature as being curved in on itself. Turn on the tele and tell me if you see anything different. If we were to describe our present culture using any of the characters out of our Lord's parables, the rich man in today's parable might be the number one choice. St. John wrote this: "he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen" (1 John 4:20).

Love; the rich man did not love. Lazarus was there, at his door step, and the rich man, in his obsession with "the good life" is oblivious to his brother. The dogs lick Lazarus' sores. The dogs do unto Lazarus as they do unto themselves. The rich man... less than that; way less than that. It is grotesque, it is deeply unsettling, and it is true – we ignore our brother. Lord, have mercy on us, we ignore our brother, our sister. Lazarus; he whom the Lord helps; did the Lord intend to help Lazarus *through* the rich man? Was the rich man oblivious to God, who may as well have been the beggar at his door? I say that for a reason, because Jesus told another parable which has this as the climax: "Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me." The converse is equally powerful. "Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me" (Matthew 25:40, 45).

Is Jesus all around you? Well, your neighbor certainly is (your neighbor is defined as any individual on the planet who is not yourself). How many of you have been loved by God through your neighbor? When you were down, unsettled, has God ever brought you hope, courage, peace through your neighbor? Have you felt it? Have you been blessed by it... God working through your neighbor to show you His love? I'm going to make a statement and ask you whether you agree or disagree. It is a strong statement. "Those who willfully, knowingly, and continually choose to commit sin show they no longer possess saving faith" (Editor's preface to Article III, Formula of Concord, Epitome [CPH, A Reader's Edition of the Book of Concord]). Agree or Disagree? Those who willfully, knowingly, and continually choose to commit sin show they no longer possess saving faith. Does that include ignoring your neighbor? I ask this simply to suggest that we don't take this sin, ignoring our neighbor, particularly seriously.

Here's an extreme example. The Governor of the great state of California is advertising in other states, promoting California as an abortion sanctuary. He has put up billboards in Mississippi that say this: Need An Abortion? California Is Ready To Help. And the billboard has a message at the bottom: "Love your neighbor as yourself. There is no greater commandment than these" (Mark 12:31). So, the billboard promotes abortion using Jesus' words to love our neighbor. We are a troubled people. Who will save us from this present darkness?

I am Lazarus. You are Lazarus, he whom the Lord helps. The sores of our sin, the sins of indifference toward our neighbor, covered our bodies and the Lord Christ came to take sins on Himself. That you might feast sumptuously on His forgiveness, Jesus died on a cross. Death and hell are real, vicious, and inescapable. You deserve that confinement. I deserve that confinement. Sin has made me a guilty defendant. The Law is cold and merciless. And Christ is my neighbor. Jesus of Nazareth is your neighbor. None but Him could stand in your place. True God, he does not remain distant, aloof. He comes into our home, our broken world. He comes not to observe and wish us well but to intervene, to act mercifully. He loves you. He gives His life for you. He saves you from death and hell by suffering your punishment. You are forgiven, protected, saved. That work is completed. It is finished and you are the recipient of His life, His righteousness, His character. Faith is alive in you, love is alive in you, Christ is alive in you. The Word of the gospel is so vibrant, so thoroughly infused with Divine power that by hearing it, by receiving it you become more than your sinful self. You become Christlike. Hallelujah! You become Christlike.

Evie and Rory are Lazarus – he whom the Lord helps. Baptized this blessed morning, they are in Christ, a new creation. Jesus is now, and ever shall be, their neighbor. God Himself is Evie's neighbor. The risen King is Rory's neighbor. He calls them by name, they follow Him, and heaven is their home. We feast sumptuously this day. Resurrection is the banquet as we receive Jesus' body and blood. Heaven is in the food which our Divine Neighbor gives us. Christ the King is on our altar to give you the most blessed of gifts – forgiveness, life, salvation, and His eternal love. Receive what He wills to give and enjoy the Christian life just exactly as it is – loving God above all things and loving our neighbor as ourself.