

Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost – 2025

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 (Revelation 7:14; Galatians 3:27). Jesus has divine resources that He shares with you, that he lavishes upon those who have no resources of their own. The Lord Christ is the rich man who gladly became poor so that you, by His poverty, might become rich (2 Corinthians 8:9). Are you delighted to be served by the Son of Man (Matthew 20:28)? Are you delighted to share with others the gifts that God has so lovingly given to you (Matthew 10:8)?

The rich man in the parable only delighted in himself, only delighted in the things of this world, only delighted by what he could consume. How dark and poor and void is the rich man's life. This is a parable that the Lord speaks but I'm going to speak about these people as though they were real because I believe that such people are *absolutely* real. The rich man is nameless. Remember that. Did the rich man ignore Lazarus once, twice? How many of y'all get the impression that the rich man ignored Lazarus habitually, so much so that the rich man no longer saw Lazarus at all? Agree or disagree: "Those who willfully, knowingly, and continually choose to commit sin show that 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 that they no longer possess saving faith"? Does that include *refusing* to help one's neighbor, being coldly and cruelly unloving toward one's neighbor?

How would you describe the rich man? What are his vices? What is the condition of his heart? Pride and greed and lust for more, the rich man steadfastly ignored the poverty in his soul. Both Augustine and Luther described our sinful nature as being curved in on itself – a relentless self-absorption, an unyielding inward focus (*incurvatus in se*). You're familiar with your sinful nature. Do you see our sinful nature as being curved in on itself? I, me, mine – those are the pronouns of our sinful nature. 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). The rich man's principal vice is that he did not love. Lazarus was there, at his doorstep, and the rich man, in his obsession with the "good life" is oblivious to his fellow man. The dogs lick Lazarus' sores. The dogs do unto Lazarus as they do unto themselves. The rich man behaves poorer than a dog.

It's grotesque. It's unsettling. *We* ignore our brother. Lazarus – he whom the Lord helps. Did the Lord intend to help Lazarus *through* the rich man? This is so simple that even a pastor can understand it – if the Lord calls us to love our neighbors, then you can bank on the fact that the Lord will give us neighbors to love. Was the rich man oblivious to God? Well, the parable has the rich man in hell so you can put a check mark by that question. But it's not the rich man who is hearing God's word today, is it? It's you, it's me. What if it had been Jesus instead of Lazarus sitting at the rich man's door? The Lord told another parable which has this line as the climax: "Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these by brothers, you did it to me." The

converse is equally striking. “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 any individual on the planet who is not yourself. How many of you have been loved by God through your neighbor? When you were sick, when you were lonely, distressed, when you needed encouragement, hope, forgiveness, when you needed help with your homework, help with your busted down car, help with the gaping hole in your heart because your spouse had just died? Has God ever brought you hope through your neighbor? Neighbors, friends, allies are pretty awesome, aren't they? How many of y'all feel good about giving yourself, your resources, to help others? Why is that? Feeling good, I mean? It's because you know in your bones that such service is truly valuable to those in need and that giving enriches them *and* you and that such service pleases God. It's love, isn't it? What makes you feel good is being an ally of God's as He loves those He sees as His neighbors.

What did the rich man love? He feasted sumptuously every day. That is a carnal pig who used the resources which God gave him to a radically self-serving end. We are all guilty of this sin to one degree or another. Whether big or small, guilty is guilty. In tennis there's a saying about where the ball lands in relation to the line: 99% out is 100% in. The bible has a saying: “Whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it” (James 2:10 NIV). Don't absolve yourself of ignoring your neighbor because sometimes you don't ignore your neighbor. We have not let God's love have its way with us and so our love for others has failed. There is no doubt as to the veracity of that statement. We will repent.

I know that you give. I know that you serve one another. I know that God is at work in you to will and act according to His good purpose (Philippians 2:13). I know that you know that you are blessed and that you, out of sheer love for God, attempt to bless others. I know it. Oftentimes we give out of our abundance. Perhaps it is easier to tithe, to give 10% of your income to Christ's church, when you make \$10 million a year. Perhaps it's easier to give when your cup runneth over. Perhaps it's easier to give when your house is paid off, your car is paid off, your credit cards are paid off, and your bookie is paid off. Perhaps it is easier to love others when you are constantly being loved by others. That's not exactly what Christ taught. It's not even close to how our Lord lived, how He loved. He was dying. Blood, life was leaving His body. He gave to the point where there was no more to give. His abundant life was being poured out as He was mired in genuine poverty – our sin was the debt of darkness that He was contending with. And He continued to give. As all His resources were being extracted from Him, He spent, proactively, all that He had... for you. “No one takes my life from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have the authority to lay it down and I have the authority to take it up again” (John 10:18). Jesus didn't see humanity in categories – those who were worthy of His giving and those who weren't. He saw everyone as His neighbor. His love was abundant. He gave until His human body allowed Him to give no more.

I am Lazarus. You are Lazarus – he whom the Lord helps. Jesus took up His life again. On Easter, the one, true man with divine resources rose from the dead. He has instituted a feast. His body and blood is a feast that you have been invited to and He feeds you with His resources. You feast on forgiveness, holiness, and love. You receive the bounty of Good Friday and Easter

in one holy meal. Your neighbor is Christ the King and He sees you on His doorstep. There is great gain in godliness with contentment (1 Timothy 6:6). All those who sup at Christ's altar are trained in godliness, trained in contentment. We flee the snares of temptation. We aren't interested in loving the things of this world (1 John 2:15-17). We feast sumptuously this day. Humanly speaking, it is a bit of tasteless unleavened bread and a mere swallow of wine but make no mistake, this is a feast of victory, a feast of redemption and a foretaste of the heavenly banquet. We will leave here prepared to be rich in good works, ready to see our neighbor, ready to share with our neighbor (1 Timothy 6:18). What a beautiful life we lead. What a beautiful life our Lord's love prompts us to lead.