

Trinity I

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[0 : 00] Our gospel text is that familiar story from Luke chapter 16 about the rich man and Lazarus. This unnamed rich man was one who dressed in the finest clothing and ate the finest foods.

Lazarus, however, was a poor man. Lazarus was reduced to begging, who was quite happy to receive some of the crumbs that fell from this rich man's table.

Day in and day out, the rich man passed Lazarus, turning a blind eye to poor Lazarus and his plight. After describing how these two men were complete opposites in their day-to-day lives, a sudden shift takes place here in this story.

The rich man now finds himself in hell, while Lazarus is no longer suffering from sores that covered his body and reduced to a life of begging.

The rich man is aware of this great reversal in fortune. He sees Lazarus now enjoying a life without hardship, without pain, while he is in great torment.

[1 : 29] The rich man knows that this pain will be his lot for all eternity. Fearful for his brothers, who apparently shared his lack of concern for others, the rich man asked Abraham to send Lazarus to his kin to warn them of the torment that awaited them if they did not repent or if they did not change.

It's the answer here from Abraham, according to this story, that I want to highlight this morning. The rich man asked Abraham to send Lazarus to warn his brothers of this terrible place, this place of torment, so that they would turn from their selfish ways and now turn towards God.

And in turning towards God, they would seek the good of their neighbors and not live a life of simply pampering themselves.

Abraham responds by saying that these five brothers have the law and the prophets. The rich man's reply is that the scriptures are not enough.

If they could just see Lazarus, if they could just see Lazarus for themselves, they would repent, they would change. And Abraham responds by saying, If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rise from the dead.

[3 : 09] The older I get, the more I understand Abraham's response to this rich man and his request to send Lazarus to his brothers.

We often think, If only I had the right persuasion or arguments, I would be more effective in sharing my faith with others, and they would come to embrace the truth.

If only people could have a vision of the resurrected Lord, or have an encounter with the divine, they would come to true belief. But in a day that rejects absolute and any objective truth, where there is merely my truth, your truth, and our truth as a tribe, the idea of truth is nothing more than personal preference.

That's it. And everyone has their own preference. And this preference comes from their own beliefs and their own actions. It comes from the way they want to live.

And this is our brave new world. Because at the heart of all the chatter is the elevation of self as supreme. No other authority outside of one's own preference really matters.

[4 : 36] There is a reason, friends, why churches have less attendance today in this country, while the gospel is spreading in third world countries, in places where people have very little in terms of material things.

There's a reason, for instance, why the number of Christians in China far surpasses the number of people who actually belong to the Communist Party in the so-called People's Republic.

When people are stripped from their egocentric and self-sufficient life, it's only then that they are willing to turn their eyes away from self and to God.

And that's what it took for this rich man sadly, however, it was too late. The rich man was in hell. We don't all wear the finest clothing.

We don't all eat the finest cuisine. But compared to the plight of the rest of the world, all of us are wealthy in this country.

[5 : 55] It's not any ism that's going to destroy this country or is destroying this country. It's simply the myth of our own self-reliance.

It's our pride that will condemn us. The story that we have before us is intended to scare the hell out of us.

Literally. We are meant to see ourselves as the rich man in this story. And we are meant to see how many times we ignore the Lazaruses in our path because the only thing that matters is me, myself, and I.

So what is the remedy for selfishness? Because sin is nothing more than selfish selfish or being selfish. Do we sell all our possessions and give freely to the poor?

Well, Jesus wouldn't argue with that approach. But I think the first step is even harder. The first thing we must do is to be brutally honest with ourselves and come to terms with the fact that we are all very self-centered people.

[7 : 13] Your priests are self-centered. You are self-centered. We don't want people interrupting our lives.

We don't want to give to others without making sure we get something in return. We don't want to hurt with the hurting or give money unless we get a good return on our investment.

That's the way we're wired, especially in this country. And we are all guilty of this. Right here, it starts here.

I am. But until we are honest with ourselves, and that's what we need to do is to be honest with ourselves, we are going to live in a constant state of self-deception.

The second thing we need to understand is that the greatest argument or the greatest persuasion for the truth of the gospel will not be received by people in our day that care little about objective propositional truth.

[8 : 25] As one theologian is fond of saying, in our day, truth must be caught, not merely taught. In other words, how we live is more important than what we say.

We are called to live humble lives of repentance daily, not looking at everybody else's flaws, but looking at ourself and our flaws.

We are called to give of ourselves for the sake of the kingdom of God, even until it's hurt and even when it's inconvenient. especially when it's inconvenient.

We are called to leave the comforts of our nice houses and our fancy cars to serve God by serving others, especially the poor, especially the downtrodden.

Friends, it's really simple, but it's very hard. we must think on Christ more and more and seek to humble ourselves before him in order to serve others.

[9 : 43] The church is God's divinely appointed place for you to invest your lives. God's The church is God's kingdom here on earth, limping along, but we are to stand for truth and to live out that truth in a world that is in a constant state of change and flux.

Christ. We need workers. We need people who give so that we might be a haven for those left in the dust by a culture that only knows one thing, power, dominance, dominion that says embrace your selfishness.

we need people to call on those who are ill. We need people to help set up for the Eucharist as we all come as beggars to receive from our master's table.

We need cleaners, painters, people who will help with the pregnancy resource center, with the food pantry, and even helping some of our people who don't get along around like they used to.

We need people to invite the hurting, not just the people of prominence. We need people to invite the hurting, the outcast, to come and to see what the Lord is doing.

[11 : 19] We need people who will visit nursing homes, write cards to those who have received bad news, or lost a loved one, or someone who just needs a friend, especially coming out of this COVID loneliness.

We have many Lazaruses before our very eyes. They're all around us. We need to ask the Lord that the Holy Spirit would open our eyes to others instead of just constantly looking at ourselves.

We need people who will invest in the kingdom of God. As much as they invest in their children, as much as they invest in their retirement, in Virginia Tech, we need people to invest in the kingdom of God.

In case you did not connect the dots to our story this morning, this story of the rich man, who is never named in this allegory, in this parable, and Lazarus, is really a story about Jesus and us. You see, Jesus is the Lazarus of this story because he was despised and rejected while here on earth. And he is the one who has been resurrected from the dead.

[12 : 44] He is the one that has the last word. And our calling is to live the life of his cross here on earth, knowing that we too will be despised and rejected by many, but we also share in his eternal life by the power of his resurrection.

And the way this happens is when we help the Lazaruses in our midst by surrendering ourselves to him, to his church, seeking to kill the rich man in all of us.

that's what this parable is about. So with this in mind, I want to leave you with the words of Jesus. It's never a bad thing to end a sermon with the words of Jesus.

Here in Matthew chapter 25 verses 31 through 46, Jesus says, when the son of man comes in his glory and all the holy angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory and all the nations will be gathered before him and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats and he will set the sheep on his right hand and the goats on his left.

Then the king will say to those on the right hand, come, you blessed of my father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food.

[14 : 21] I was thirsty and you gave me drink. I was a stranger and you took me in. I was naked and you clothed me. I was sick and you visited me.

I was in prison and you came to me. Then the righteous will answer him saying, Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you or thirsty and give you drink?

When did we see you a stranger and take you in or naked and clothe you? Or when did we see you sick or in prison and come to you? And the king will answer to them, assuredly, I say to you, in as much as you did it to one of the least of these, my brethren, you did it unto me.

Then he will also say to those on the left hand, like the rich man, depart from me, you cursed into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.

For I was hungry and you gave me no food. I was thirsty and you gave me no drink. I was a stranger and you did not take me in, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.

[15 : 33] then they also will answer him saying, Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison and did not minister to you?

Then he will answer them, assuredly, I say to you, in as much as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.

And these will go into everlasting punishment. but the righteous unto eternal life. Amen.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.