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St. John's & Immanuel Lutheran Churches – Kimball, NE & Burns, WY

First Sunday after Trinity

June 19, 2022

Text: Luke 16:19–31

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

I find this Sunday to be filled with things that need to be said. Urgent things. First of all, I want to say thank you to the wonderful laymen who covered for me last Sunday. In the name of Christ Jesus, thank you for your loving service to God's holy people. You guys embraced the task set before you with masculine grace and determination. Well done, good and faithful servants of God. Our congregation is blessed to have such spiritual leaders.

Next, and somewhat related to what I just said, thanks and encouragement must be given to the fathers of our congregation. Both our physical fathers who care for their children and grandchildren as well as our spiritual father who love and nurture not only those of their own families but the members of the household of faith. Your prayers and intercessions stand as a bulwark against the evils of this world which seek to silence Christ's precious Gospel and to destroy the saving faith implanted by the Holy Spirit into the hearts of Christians. Do not grow weary in your labor. Continue to train your children in the nurture and discipline of the Lord Jesus as the apostle Paul teaches in Ephesians 6:4.

And we must be like the mighty men of old who spoke the truth in love. You fathers are the given the noble task, the front-line, first order priority work of teaching your children the mighty deeds of God. Listen to Psalm 78:4:

⁴We will not hide them from their children, but tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the LORD, and his might, and the wonders that he has done.

But before you can fulfill that great task, you must first learn God's Word and truth, and under the grace and strength of the Holy Spirit, live according to it. Consider Deuteronomy 11:18–21:

¹⁸“You shall therefore lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul, and you shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. ¹⁹You shall teach them to your children, talking of them when you are sitting in your house, and when you are walking by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. ²⁰You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates, ²¹that your days and the days of your children may be multiplied in the land that the LORD swore to your fathers to give them, as long as the heavens are above the earth.

Dear fathers in Christ, there is no greater task than nurturing your wives and children, and your fellow brothers and sisters in Christ with the precious gospel of Christ. The world may not recognize your efforts. It may, in fact, discourage you by demeaning your efforts, mocking and scorning them. You may even be threatened monetarily. Reputations and social standing may be jeopardized. But know this. God the Holy Trinity is well pleased with your faithfulness. He will reward you according to His riches in glory. Father’s Day is but one day of the year in which we give thanks for you. God our heavenly Father rejoices in you constantly.

Now we comes to today’s primary task. The preaching of God’s Word from the appointed Gospel reading from Luke 16. We need to know that the Lord Jesus is on His way to Jerusalem where He will eventually be rejected by the elders of Israel, handed over to Pontus Pilate under whose authority He (i.e., Jesus) will be crucified, and ultimately through the will and power of the Father be raised from the dead for the world’s justification. Jesus is on His way to save the world from the judgment of sin, from the condemnation of hell sentenced upon the devil and all who follow in His rebellion, and from the nauseating corruption of the world.

On the way to complete this greatest of God’s mighty works, Jesus pauses from time to time to teach and preach about His kingdom. His preaching has been controversial and severely rejected and scorned by the Pharisees. Luke 16:14 (just five verses before today’s text) describes how acrimonious things have

become between Jesus and the Pharisees. Vs. 14, “The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all these things, and they ridiculed him.” In Luke 15:2, the Pharisees grumbled because Jesus received and ate with sinners. Now, they are ridiculing Him because of the love and forgiveness He gives to the sinners He receives and eats with. Seeking and saving the lost – the very heart of the Gospel – has become ridiculous and scornful to these self-righteous Pharisees.

This is a warning we must all consider. Too easily our human pride and ambition corrupts the grace and mercy of God revealed in Christ. Our sinful nature continually seeks to exalt itself even into this precious gift of salvation. Good works, our own merit, even our own will. Look at my good works, my growth in sanctification, my worthiness of God’s love and attention. But the gospel of eternal life, the forgiveness of sins, and the hope of eternal glory must solely rest in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. His perfect, divine love. His mercy. His blood shed on Calvary’s cross and His glorious resurrection from the dead are our highest and greatest treasures. They are the greatest works of God studied by all who delight in the truth. The great marvel of marvels is that God the Father loves us with such passion and devotion that He gave His only begotten Son for us and for our salvation. All who believe in Christ Jesus shall not perish but have eternal life. That which the human sin and pride ridicules – the gospel of salvation freely given in Christ Jesus – is that which we Christians cherish as the greatest good.

Luke recorded that the Pharisees were lovers of money rather than lovers of God (Lk. 16:14). The parable of the rich man and Lazarus from Luke 16 reveals the vanity and unreliability of wealth and riches. Two men are described, the poplar opposites of each other. An unnamed rich man feast sumptuously every day. He was clothed in purple. In the ancient world, purple clothing was extremely expensive. Only the wealthiest of the wealthy could afford such extravagance. Lazarus, however, was a poor as poor gets. He had to beg to survive. He couldn’t walk. According to vs. 20, Lazarus was laid by the rich man’s gate to beg. And we readily remember and feel the anguish of Lazarus’ oozing sores. His only comfort was the dogs who licked those sores, providing some relief and even a bit of cleansing. By all appearances, the rich man was successful while Lazarus was a failure. No one would wish to live like Lazarus.

But the truth was hidden under the external circumstances of these two men. The rich man appeared to have all the blessings of God. Whereas Lazarus seems to be utterly abandoned by God. His only comfort was the dogs licking his sores. But the truth was revealed after their deaths. Lazarus had nothing earthly to place his trust. No money, no health, very little human comfort. But he had the greatest treasure of all! Saving faith in God, the Lord of heaven and earth. At his death, Lazarus was carried by the angels to Abraham's side. Abraham, that great patriarch of old, the father of the faithful, led Lazarus into God's presence. Again, just a reminder on this Father's Day as to what fathers are called to do: lead those under their love and care to God.

Consider what Jesus is teaching here! Lazarus, who lived one of the most wretched and miserable lives imaginable, was led by one of the greatest men in human history into the presence of God. And the reason for such an honor? Lazarus had saving faith in God; he was a Christian. Lazarus didn't go to heaven because he was poor and miserable. He was given what every Christian receives in his baptism: the eternal treasure of life, forgiveness, the Holy Spirit, and adoption into God's family. Nothing else matters – from the perspective of eternity – than knowing and loving God by faith unto salvation. Everything else in our earthly lives must be subordinate to this greatest need: saving faith in Christ Jesus. For this most important gift, we seek and pray for day by day in the confidence and certainty of Christ's sacrificial death and glorious resurrection from the dead. He is the reason, the only reason, we can have such confidence. Christ Jesus died and rose again to save me, to save my family and friends, to save the world. He alone is our hope and comfort.

The rich man had every earthly comfort in abundance. But his wealth proved to be a false, unreliable god that failed to provide his greatest need. Salvation and eternal life. The exquisite food, the purple clothing, a great home, the applause and admiration of men – all these things failed. The parable describes his eternity as one filled with the misery and anguish of fire and bitter regret. Did he suffer such a fate because he was rich? No, perish the thought. The rich man failed in his earthly life because he did not have saving faith in the Lord who created him for fellowship with God and man. He did not love God because he had no faith; the rich man thought he didn't need God. Likewise, the rich man

had no love for his fellow man. He could have been a father to Lazarus and provided for his physical and spiritual needs. But he could not give what he did not have. This wealthiest of wealth men was poverty stricken, utterly bankrupt.

The Bible teaches us that the truly blessed life is one filled with hearing the Word of God and living according to it. Your blessedness does not rest in your wealth, your career, or in your prestige but in the faith which lays hold to the Lord Jesus Christ who suffered and died as the atoning sacrifice for your sins and was raised again to give life to all who look to Him. Apart from Christ Jesus, there is only death. But in Him there is life. Lazarus came to know that life. May God the Father grant us the same life of faith and faithfulness by His Spirit through His beloved Son, Jesus Christ.

✠ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. ✠ Amen.

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.