

St. Peter Lutheran Church
June 7, 2026
First Sunday after Trinity
Luke 16:19-31

The Pharisees were lovers of money. They derided Jesus as He taught against the sin of covetousness. They would not hear Him when He said, “You cannot serve God and mammon.” So our Lord tells them a story about a certain rich man and a certain beggar. The point of the story is plain. Love of riches leads to hell. Love of God leads to heaven. So the story is both a warning against the love of money, and its a comfort and exhortation toward perseverance to those who love the Lord. For though the wicked often appear blessed in this life and the righteous often appear despised of God, the outward appearance often is deceiving.

First, look at the rich man. His abundance of possessions is no sin. However, his abundance of possessions is also no proof that He pleases God and is righteous. And we see by the man’s life that he is without faith in God. He most certainly serves Mammon. He puts his hope and trust in this idol, he seeks all good and comfort in this idol. His life displays no love, which is faith’s certain fruit. Faith in God means that one knows all good things come from above. Faith in God knows His inestimable treasures that do not rust or fade, but are kept safe in heaven regardless of how things go for us on earth. Such faith knows how good and gracious God has been toward us, and so desires to do the same for others. Such faith in God is evident in the mercy shown to others. Faith moves us to give of ourselves and our resources for others, even as God has made us partakers of all that is His.

Therefore, the rich man’s neglect of Lazarus, who is lying at his very door, reveals the inward reality of the rich man’s heart. Though on the outside he appears most blessed, his lack of love reveals the inward reality—a heart devoid of faith in God—a heart disposed entirely toward an idol. In his covetous sin, lacking faith in God, instead of breaking forth in love toward his neighbor, he seeks only his own good, and tramples over his neighbor in this pursuit. This certain rich man is especially callous, for Lazarus lies at his door with open wounds festering. The rich man sees his need and shuts his heart against him, showing that God does not abide in him. The dogs show more pity for Lazarus than the rich man, using their tongues to clean his wounds. Yet, the rich man deems himself blessed and righteous and Lazarus cursed for his sins. But the rich man is entirely blind in his understanding. His trust is entirely wrong.

Lazarus, on the other hand, appears devoid of all blessing. He appears forsaken by God, punished as an evildoer. But Jesus, in telling of each man’s death and situation following death, shows the reality of the rich man and Lazarus, despite outward appearances. Lazarus’ fate upon his death shows that Lazarus had faith in God. He was not blessed because he was poor but because he had faith in God and believed His promises. He just as well could have been richer than the rich man, so long as his heart cleaved to God and not to his riches. The one who has faith in God is not a slave to his possessions or lack thereof, but rather knows, as St. Paul did,

how to be content in any situation, both in abundance and also in need. For Lazarus' hope was not in riches that pass away, but in the word of the Lord that endures forever.

So it was that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom.

Abraham had been promised that in his seed all the nations of the earth would be blessed.

Abraham believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness. Lazarus also believed, and so he too was blessed along with believing Abraham. Notice that Jesus names Lazarus and leaves the rich man unnamed. Lazarus belonged to the LORD, and He called him by name. So as Lazarus suffered, and as Lazarus died, he feared no evil, for the LORD was with him. Having died, he rested from his labor and was comforted by the Lord with Abraham, to await the day of the resurrection of his body and the life of the world to come, where Lazarus **will sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.**

But what of the rich man? For Jesus tells us of his death as well. **The rich man also died and was buried. And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.** Lazarus who suffered patiently in this life, hoping in the Lord, received the outcome of his faith, the salvation of his soul. The rich man, who greedily cared for himself in this life, allowing suffering to remain the problem of others and not himself, received also the outcome of his faith, which is perdition. The rich man too awaits now the resurrection of the his body, but when he is raised to give an account and judgment is pronounced, he will enter into eternal fire, forever banished from the heavenly banquet of joy and mirth. And as these two men await the final day, Lazarus is comforted while the rich man is tormented.

What does the rich man in torment do? First, he asks father Abraham for mercy, asking that Lazarus be sent, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool the rich man's tongue as he is tormented in the flame. Abraham's response is twofold—first, this is the necessary outcome of the two men's lives—the rich man already received all the good his god could provide for him—while Lazarus received evil things with hope in the Lord. So Lazarus is now comforted and the rich man is tormented. For Lazarus' hope was in the Lord, whose mercy endures forever. The rich man's hope was in his riches, all his treasures were on earth, while Lazarus' treasures were in heaven.

Second, Abraham says that it's impossible for anything to be done now. He says, **“And besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us.”** Nothing can be done now. **It is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment.**

This is why the call of the Gospel should not be put off. Not only does it run the tremendous risk of grieving or even blaspheming the Holy Spirit to our eternal damnation, but we also know not the hour or the day—either of Christ's return in Judgment or of our own death. So it stands written, **“Today, if you hear his voice, Do not harden your hearts.”** And, **“Behold, now is the day of salvation.”** We plead with you not to receive the grace of God in vain.

The rich man, coming to the realization of his own fate, finally turns his attention to others. **Then he said [to Abraham], “I beg you therefore father, that you would send [Lazarus] to my father’s house, for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment.”**

To this request, we are pointed to the sure and certain written Word of God—**Abraham said to him, “They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.”** Everything we need for our salvation is given to us in the Scriptures. Remember Jesus on the road to Emmaus speaking to the two disciples—**And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.** The Scriptures speak of Christ—the One promised to come, to suffer, to die, and on the third day rise. Now that He has come, the Scriptures are laid bare by the apostolic testimony, which also is Holy Scripture, the Word of God. Now Christ, who was the content of Moses and the prophets, is seen plainly and clearly through the apostolic testimony. We can now read the historic event of what Isaiah saw ahead of time—the virgin conceiving and bearing a Son. We can read about Jesus being sold for 30 pieces of silver even as Zechariah was disgraced with these slave wages. We hear of Jesus being led like a sheep to the slaughter, just like Isaiah spoke. We see the Father sparing not His only Son but giving Him up for us all, even as we heard of Abraham being asked to sacrifice his son, his only son, whom he loved. And in the events of Jesus Christ, we see that God did provide for Himself a lamb for the burnt offering. And in the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, what was anticipated by the blood of bulls and goats was fulfilled by the Blood of the Son of God—the sins of the world were taken away. The Holy One did not see corruption, as the Psalmist wrote, but instead God raised Him up from the dead. **Just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so the Son of Man was three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.**

It’s all there in the Scriptures, and Jesus has done it, and this Gospel is preached to the world—the rich man doesn’t need Lazarus to go from the dead to warn people—if they won’t hear Moses and the Prophets—if they won’t heed the Word of God—neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead. No other sign is needed—Jesus has suffered, died, and risen again. And if God made Man, Jesus Christ, rising from the dead and being seen by Cephas, then by the twelve, and then by over five hundred brethren at once is not enough, a ghost from beyond the grave certainly won’t do it.

So this Gospel stands both as warning and comfort—warning to those who put their trust in their riches and are not rich toward God, and comfort to those who trust in the Lord, whether in plenty or in want. It stands as a call to repentance for us all, and a gracious invitation to find our help in the Lord. It helps us understand that outward circumstances don’t always align with what we think of blessed and cursed, but that there is nothing hidden that will not be revealed. Even as Christ, who was made to be the poorest, the most despised, and least in the Kingdom of God, has now entered into His glory and is seated at the right hand of the Father, so also we who are in Christ, who have that same Father, no matter our lot now, look forward to an exceeding and eternal weight of glory. Amen.