

Luke 16:19–31
1st Sun. after Trinity
Kaiserslautern Ev. Luth. Ch.
June 11, 2023

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dearly bought hearers by the blood of Jesus Christ,

The Christian faith is always practical. What we believe has an effect on how we live, and how we live has an effect on what we believe. That's why Jesus speaks so much about our use of the material goods God has given us. Jesus says: "where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." If you trust in the LORD, that trust will be reflected in the use of your wealth. And the use of your wealth will affect your trust in the LORD. Fallen man is tempted to think he can be a Christian and at the same time use his earthly goods however he pleases. He believes a great chasm has been fixed between what we believe and how we live. The new man, however, recognizes the temptations inherent in material wealth. When not considered from the right perspective, the blessings God has given us can turn into a curse. But considered rightly, the blessings God has given us become tools God uses to serve our neighbor and extend the Kingdom of God in a magnificent way.

In our Gospel Lesson for today, we are presented with two characters. There's the rich man clothed in purple and fine linen. He had material wealth and showed that material wealth in what he wore, like flaunting upper end, name brand attire. Rather than use his riches to serve his neighbor, the rich man used his riches to show how rich he was. Wealth was accrued for its own sake, like the parable of the man who built new barns for all his grain (Luke 12:16–21). Rather than trust in the LORD to provide for him from day to day, this rich man provided for his own future so he would always have enough to eat, drink, and be merry. He dressed like a king and he

feasted sumptuously everyday like a king. Notice that the rich man wasn't completely self-absorbed, though. He did care for his family, at least in the afterlife, hoping to prevent them from going to the place of torment.

And then there was the poor man, Lazarus. It's interesting that the rich man remains nameless, yet Jesus tells us the name of the poor man. That's the opposite of what happens all over the world. Everybody knows the names of the wealthy and famous, while the poor multitudes remain anonymous. The name "Lazarus" comes from the Hebrew "Eleazar," meaning "God will help." Poor Lazarus needed help. He was covered in sores and only desired to be fed with the crumbs falling from the rich man's table. Maybe the rich man threw Lazarus a bone every once in a while, like a dog, some crumbs, or a bit of change here and there. Or maybe the rich man never even gave a thought to poor Lazarus. He was too focused on his own enjoyment of life. Why ruin the party with the thought of suffering and impoverishment? The rich man could have easily helped poor Lazarus. He could have fed him, clothed him, taken him in, or provided accommodations and time to heal. Poor Lazarus needed help. Only the dogs seemed to care. The rich man didn't help Lazarus, but as the name Lazarus implies: "God will help."

The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. So God did help Lazarus, not by extending his earthly life but by granting him eternal life. The rich man, however, who only desired to serve himself and his own was tormented in Hades. As Abraham told the rich man: "Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish." Those who only live for this life will soon lose everything. But those who live in view of the life to come, even if they have nothing here, will have everything there. The rich man sought to help himself and gave little thought to others. Poor Lazarus received

nothing in this world, but God gave him all things in eternal life. The rich man laid up for himself treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal. Lazarus laid up for himself treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroy and where thieves do not break in and steal. Those considered first in this life will be considered last in eternal life, and those considered last in this life will be considered first in eternal life (Matt 19:30).

In case you're thinking like so many Christians throughout history that the solution, then, would be to give away all earthly wealth, live as poor beggars, and so earn the kingdom of heaven, we are reminded that money is not the problem, it is the love of money that is the root of all kinds of evil (1 Tim 6:10). As the Apostle Paul says: "those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs." "Those who desire to be rich" includes both rich and poor and everyone in between. The overwhelming desire for money or any kind of worldly gain infects those who have more money as well as those who wish they had more money.

This desire to always have more leads to a focus on helping ourselves in this life rather than focusing on life in the world to come. Our trust turns from the Lord and giver of life to the material things the Lord and giver of life has given to us or which we seek for ourselves. Rather than see worldly gain as a means to serving others, we see it as an end in itself. By then we are wandering away from the faith and piercing ourselves with many pangs. As the Proverb says: "One gives freely, yet grows all the richer; another withholds what he should give, and only suffers want" (Prov 11:24). There are temporal and spiritual blessings for the generous and there

are temporal and spiritual pangs for the miserly. “Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully” (2 Cor 9:6).

Today, June 11th, also happens to be St. Barnabas day. Barnabas was one of St. Paul’s coworkers and, like Paul, he is even called an Apostle (Acts 14:14). Barnabas was just his nickname, meaning “son of encouragement,” or “son of the paraclete.” The actual name of Barnabas was Joseph. He was a Levite and a native of the island of Cyprus. As one of those early believers in Jerusalem, Barnabas was “of one heart and soul” with the other believers. “No one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common.” None of those early believers had any need, “for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.” Barnabas, too, “sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles’ feet” (Acts 4:32–37).

Barnabas, the “son of encouragement,” continues encouraging Christians in the Church today through his example recorded for us in the Book of Acts. Barnabas sold what he had and gave the proceeds to the church for distribution to the poor. He wasn’t like Ananias and Sapphira, who sold property and then kept back some of the proceeds for themselves, lying to the Holy Spirit. Barnabas wasn’t like the rich man, who lived sumptuously from day to day, giving no thought to the poor in body and spirit. Barnabas sold what he had, gave the proceeds to the church, and then traveled with Paul to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ all over the Mediterranean world. Paul and Barnabas then appointed elders, or pastors, in every church the Lord built through them (Acts 14:23), and so the early church grew by leaps and bounds. Barnabas gave everything, and when someone gives all, a lot can be done. Examples from the history of the church abound.

So should we sell all our material goods and give the proceeds to the church? Should we forsake everything and preach the Gospel in foreign lands? Not necessarily. But we should always be ready to give up the blessings God has given us to make room for the other blessings God wants to work through us. As Christians, we love our neighbor not in words only, but in deed and in truth (1 John 3:18). We help and support our neighbors, especially those of the household of faith, in every spiritual and bodily need. In short, we love because God first loved us (1 John 4:19). You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you by His poverty might become rich (2 Cor 8:9). If God so loved us, we also ought to love one another (1 John 4:11). And that love is not simply lip service. It is a love willing to give up everything for the beloved. Whoever loves God must also love his brother (1 John 4:21).

So how do we love our neighbor? It's not as simple as throwing money at a situation. The answers are as diverse as there are people who need your help. For most people, the one thing they need is to hear about Jesus and how much He loves them, that He laid down His life for their sake, rose from the dead, and wants them to join Him in eternal life. After death, the rich man begged that Lazarus be sent to his father's house to warn his brothers, that they not join him in torment. But Abraham said: "They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them . . . If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead." The greatest act of love you can do for yourself, for your family and friends, for your coworkers and acquaintances, and for people all over the world is to bring them God's Word in this life. There are spiritual beggars sitting outside our churches the world over, waiting for someone to come to them with the Word of life, the message of repentance and forgiveness of sins in Jesus Christ. The greatest gift you can give to those you know and don't know is to steep

yourself in God's Word and pass that Word on to future generations. Support the work of the church with the material blessings God has given you. Use the blessings you've been given to be a blessing to others, both spiritually and physically.

As Christians, you know our Lord Jesus Christ gave up everything on your behalf. You are not your own; you were bought with a price (1 Cor 6:20). You know that everything you've been given, your life, your family, your possessions, your money and reputation, everything you've been given is a gift from God that God can work through to build up the body of Christ and add to our number daily those who are being saved. Don't lose sight of who you are as a child of God, as one our Lord is working through to lead others to Him. Like Jesus will say: "As you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me" (Matt 25:40). Love your brother . . . and sister, father and mother, relatives near and far, neighbors, friends, acquaintance, and everyone God brings into your life, by giving them the pure Word of God and helping and supporting them in whatever needs they might have: that's how God's kingdom expands, here in time and there in eternity. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. We stand for the Offertory.