



## Lectionary 26, Year C

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16<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost: Gospel Text – Luke 16:19-31

### **Luke 16:19-31**

[Jesus said:] <sup>19</sup> "There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. <sup>20</sup> And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, <sup>21</sup> who longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man's table; even the dogs would come and lick his sores. <sup>22</sup> The poor man died and was carried away by the angels to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried. <sup>23</sup> In Hades, where he was being tormented, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far away with Lazarus by his side. <sup>24</sup> He called out, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in agony in these flames.' <sup>25</sup> But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that during your lifetime you received your good things and Lazarus in like manner evil things, but now he is comforted here, and you are in agony. <sup>26</sup> Besides all this, between you and us a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who might want to pass from here to you cannot do so, and no one can cross from there to us.' <sup>27</sup> He said, 'Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father's house <sup>28</sup> for I have five brothers—that he may warn them, so that they will not also come into this place of torment.' <sup>29</sup> Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the prophets; they should listen to them.' <sup>30</sup> He said, 'No, father Abraham, but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.' <sup>31</sup> He said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.' "

## **SERMON TEXT:**

Okay everybody, hold onto your hats, I'm going to break the big unwritten rule in church and society. I'm gonna go there. It may cost me my job, my friends, even my family, but sometimes you have to step up and take a chance, and today the gospel is screaming at me to talk about one thing, and no matter how much I try to ignore it for my own safety and yours, the Spirit will simply not let it go. So here I go, and God forgive me, God protect me, I'm gonna to talk about...money.

All of the lessons today have a major theme in common-wealth or the lack of it. We have four readings focused upon what it looks like to have wealth, misuse wealth, not have wealth, not trust wealth, and how wealth can take us away from trust in God. Amos is a warning to those who don't recognize the pain and worry of others, but simply enjoy the blessings in their lives, while the Psalm reminds us that earthly powers fade and God looks after the poor and orphaned. Timothy is much more blunt, and contains a phrase that many of us have heard, but in a slightly different way, and we'll come back to that in a moment. Finally, we have another parable from Jesus in Luke. This is one I really appreciate for a variety of reasons, but today, we're going to focus on the vision of the rich man and the results of that vision.

But no matter how you try to break it down, today's lessons seem all about the money, and in the world we live in right here, money is a great focus of our lives, but none of us like to talk about our own. For example, we have conversations about the price of gas, the cost of land for sale, taxes, tariffs, or the amount someone else spent on something, but heaven forbid any of us ask or speak

about what we spend our money on. If I walked into any congregation and asked you to write down your yearly income, figure out 10% of that amount, and put it in the offering plate, I would probably be asked to leave, and that's putting it nicely. Although some churches do that, we Lutherans tend to be a little more hesitant, but you see my point. Money is a focus in our lives, but we don't want to talk about what we do with our own money.

After all, "money is the root...". Ah, back to Timothy. I would guess that most of us have heard that phrase in exactly that way, right. Money is the root of all evil. However, that is not what is written. Let's reread the beginning of verse ten, "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil". Do you hear the difference-money is not *the* root of all evil, it is a root of all kinds of evil? Wealth is not inherently bad in itself, but it can be the basis for so much injustice, indifference, and sin. In other words, it's not sinful to be rich, but it is how those riches are used or not used to benefit others as well as ourselves. How do we use our money to injure others, to control others, to outcast others, to judge others-that is where evil enters in.

And where our parable takes shape. Wealth and poverty-two realities that even Jesus acknowledges as probably never coming to end in this world, "you will always have the poor with you". Neither the rich man or Lazarus are in an immediate place of judgment-they are neutral. We are not told that either gained wealth or poverty through any actions of their own-they just are. A rich man and Lazarus. And they just are in the same vicinity of each other-here is an opportunity for interaction, for outreach, for community and relationship-all things that Jesus is pretty big

on. However, it is implied that nothing like that happens-the rich man eats and Lazarus asks nothing but crumbs and receives nothing. There is chasm between them, not a gate, not a wall, a chasm where the rich man will not cross and Lazarus cannot cross. Now, here is where it gets tricky-in death the roles are seemingly reversed, and it seems justice has taken place, but we still somehow sympathize with the rich man because we all know the homeless and hungry we've walked or driven past, and fear what our future may be. And yes, we should be aware of our actions, but the rich man has a bigger issue than being where he is because I do believe he has a chance of change where he ended and how he got there, but he still can't face his (or Lazarus') reality. Even in torment, he thinks he is more important, more worthy than Lazarus. Notice that he doesn't address Lazarus, I'm surprised he even knew his name, he addresses Abraham, the one he sees as worthy of his attention and has the gall to make demands of Lazarus. Send him to tend me, and when Abraham cannot, he demands again that Lazarus be sent to do his bidding to save his brothers. His concern is never for Lazarus, in life or death. His concern is never for anyone but himself and his loved ones. Nothing about him has changed in death-he has always seen himself as better and more important-and that is the chasm that cannot be crossed. Without a changed heart or mind, the rich man is left in agony, he would rather be tormented than see in Lazarus an equally beloved child of God. In that, money is a root of evil.

You can all take a deep breath because I am not going to ask you to write down your annual salaries for me. I'm not going to ask you to get out your checkbooks, if anyone still carries those, and tell me where your money has gone. I'm not going to ask about

your debt or your wealth. However, I am going to ask of all of us, from the child with a quarter in their pocket to the person trying to manage their living to the last day of their life, all of us in other words, what does our wealth say to us? And let me clarify, when I say wealth, I don't just mean money, I mean means, ability, things that place us in "higher" standing than others, including race, gender, dollars, and location. What does our wealth say to us about who we are? What does our wealth say about us to others? And do we recognize how our wealth can bring us closer or separate us from God and God's people. Do we feel proud of ourselves because we have a good home, a reliable car, and money in the bank and others don't? Do we understand how others in our lives and past made that possible or the opportunities we were given that others did not have? Wealth is a very tricky subject, and a lot of times it makes me angry that Jesus wanted to talk about it so much.

On the other hand, it seems Jesus wants to talk about it so much, so that it does not root evil within us. Jesus asks us to struggle with these difficult issues, so that the torment and agony would happen here and not in eternity. It would seem that all the lessons, while seemingly focused on wealth, are actually about not focusing on wealth, but instead about putting our trust in God, putting our money out to the world in ways that help others, and not allowing ourselves to become so content with stuff that we stop seeking ways to make the world more just, more honest, and more equal. Jesus told this parable knowing that he would be the one to breach the chasm that separates agony from paradise, that he would go to hell and back, that he would be the one to rise from the dead, in hopes that others would hear this message of love for all people, from the lowliest to the haughtiest

and everyone in between. That all would hear the message that community, that faith and hope, that love is more important and more necessary, that that is true wealth-to love and be loved in return.

Amen.

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