

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church
Quincy, IL
Rev. Martin Eden

Pentecost 16
Saturday, September 24, 2022, at 5:00 p.m.
Sunday, September 25, 2022, at 9:00 a.m.

“Our Faith is Credited as Righteousness”

Luke 16:19-31

What kind of man was the rich man? What kind of man was Lazarus? Which of these two would you have wanted to be friends with? The rich man was a leader of the community dressed in the finest clothes and liked to have his friends and neighbors over for big dinner parties. Those are the kind of friends we like.

Lazarus was a dirty, smelly beggar with open sores. How ready are we to engage in intimate contact with persons of that sort? To my shame, I will admit that I am the chief of sinners. When we were in Myrtle Beach this summer, there were a couple of times I made a point to walk on the other side of the street.

Looking at the story from the comfort of the pew (or the pulpit), it is easy to despise the rich man because he had great wealth and would not share it with his less fortunate neighbor. However, if you lived in that town, which of those two would you have desired to have as your friend?

It is very possible that the rich man was loved and respected in his community. And it is very possible that Lazarus was despised and avoided by more than just this rich man. We know it is possible because we see it. The

righteousness and the unrighteousness of a person cannot be determined by the clothes they wear or the curb appeal of their homes.

But it is not that the rich man was a sinner and Lazarus was not. They were both sinners and both deserving of God's wrath. But the faith of their hearts was not the same. The rich man's god was his wealth and all the things that he perceived he had achieved for himself, including his good name and reputation. Most likely he was proud of himself. And these were the things in which he trusted. This is exactly what Luther is talking about in the excerpt from his Large Catechism which is printed in your bulletin.

Luther says: "Many a person imagines that he has God and everything he needs, provided he has money and property. He relies upon these, boasts about them, and feels so immovably secure that he cares about no one. But look, he too has a god, named mammon, that is the money and property to which he has given his whole heart. Mammon is the world's favorite idol."

Lazarus' God, on the other hand, was the Living God – the God of Abraham; the God who had given him life, salvation, and all things. Lazarus was a sinner who deserved nothing from God, and received nearly nothing in this life. But he trusted His Father in heaven, and like Abraham, his faith was credited to him as righteousness.

The main difference between the rich man and Lazarus was not their bank account or social status or their level of personal hygiene. The main difference was their attitude toward God's Word. Lazarus was sustained by it through even the darkest days of his life. The rich man counted it as nothing.

Even while in the torment of hell – the ultimate torment of being separated from God – even while in hell, the rich man’s only thought was to avoid suffering for himself and his living brothers. He wanted a little drink of water for himself, and for Lazarus to leave heaven and come down to hell so that he could receive a little comfort from Lazarus. And then he wanted Lazarus to leave heaven, come back from the dead, and scare his brothers into avoiding God’s wrath.

There was no love for God in his heart or in his requests (certainly no love for Lazarus either). Even in the pit of hell, he did not recognize the value of the presence of God’s Word. But that really isn’t surprising. Having only the fear of punishment does not create faith or love. The Law can never accomplish that. The Law can cause a proud head to bow, and can crush us down and bring us to our knees. It is in the sweet words of the Gospel, it is only in the forgiveness of sins – the washing away of sins through Christ’s blood – that God raises us up and fills us with hope and joy.

For all of the “sumptuous” living that the rich man experienced in his life, he did not know the joy that Lazarus had in the words of Moses and the prophets. That is the irony of this parable. It was not just after their death that Lazarus’ true joy exceeded that of the rich man. During Lazarus’ life, the presence of God within him gave him a joy and a hope that was unknown to the rich man. And even though Lazarus’ body was weak by worldly standards, within him was a strength that the world could not perceive or understand.

Our world envies the “lifestyles of the rich and famous.” Millions of magazines have been sold over the years so that we can get a taste of what that

kind of life would be like. And millions of more magazines have been sold because of the guilty pleasure we get from seeing the misfortune and unhappiness of the beautiful people on the cover. But that is not the point that Jesus is trying to make. This was not some story to be read in the grocery store checkout aisle. Jesus didn't tell this story so that the masses would feel good that this rich guy got what he deserved.

The point of the parable is that both men are sinners. Both men had been exposed to Moses and the prophets. God desired for both men to reside with Abraham. Abraham even refers to the rich man as his "child." This story is not about class warfare or bringing down the rich. This story is about the power of God's Word and concludes with the foreshadowing that "if someone should rise from the dead," it is still through the Word of God – through Moses and the prophets – that God will create and sustain faith.

Someone has risen from the dead, as Moses and the prophets foretold – as the witness of Scripture reminds us again and again. Jesus, the Righteous One, has made you righteous.

As I said before, the righteousness and the unrighteousness of a person cannot be determined by the clothes you wear or the curb appeal of your homes. Whether the world labels us rich or poor, we are sinners who deserve God's wrath and judgment. We deserve nothing in this life. We deserve nothing in the life to come except an eternity with the rich man in hell. Our salvation is that, like Abraham, like Lazarus, our faith has been credited to us as righteousness. Amen.