

Pentecost 18, 2010C

756 “Why Should Cross and Trial Grieve Me”

*708 “Lord, Thee I Love With All My Heart”

648 “Glorious Things of You Are Spoken”

“Hear the Scriptures”

¹⁹[Jesus said:] “There was a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. ²⁰And at his gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, ²¹who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man’s table. Moreover, even the dogs came and licked his sores. ²²The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham’s side. The rich man also died and was buried, ²³and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. ²⁴And he called out, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame.’ ²⁵But Abraham said, ‘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. ²⁶And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us.’ ²⁷And he said, ‘Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father’s house— ²⁸for I have five brothers —so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment.’ ²⁹But Abraham said, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.’ ³⁰And he said, ‘No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’ ³¹He said to him, ‘If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.’” (Luke 16:19-31)

Today’s Gospel reading is full of contrasts.

First Contrast—Riches and Poverty

First is the contrast between the rich man and Lazarus. The Rich man had everything in life. Lazarus had nothing.

The rich man was clothed in purple and fine linen. He feasted presumptuously every day.

Lazarus, the poor man, was covered with sores. He longed for the crumbs from the rich man’s table. His comfort was the dogs that came to lick his sores.

Such a contrast is nothing but recognizable. Their differences are worlds apart. The one had everything, and abundance in life. He was wealthy and lived in excess. The other had nothing, and was in poverty. His was a sad state of affairs.

Such outward markers as wealth or poverty in this account, however, don’t tell us the full story. Nor do they tell us the complete story of our own lives in this world.

The rich man had everything, or so it seemed. And Lazarus had nothing, or so it seemed. But in fact, as we consider the rest of the account, we find that though the rich man seemed to have

everything, he was greatly lacking. And though Lazarus seemed to have nothing, he had abundance.

Riches and wealth do not make one rich and wealthy. These are only temporal things. They do not last. They have an end. Their luster will soon cease and their joy will leave you wanting.

True riches and wealth is that treasure that won't rust, decay, or be stolen, that which Jesus speaks of when He says, **Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also** (Matthew 6:19-21).

True riches and genuine wealth is that treasure which God Himself provides, which “no one” and “no thing” can take away. It is the gift of God. It is Jesus. It is His Word, through which God makes Himself known to you—your Savior—your redeemer.

In Jesus, God gives you eternal life—eternal life—which lasts forever—and not merely 70 or 80 + years, should the Lord bless with such length of days.

The Psalmist writes, **Teach us to number our days, That we may gain a heart of wisdom** (Psalm 90:12).

Amen, Lord—**Teach us to number our days** that we not take You nor Your Word for granted.

God forgives you your sins. His forgiveness is matter of life and death. And yet, all the world says that this is nothing. And the church, too, tramples God's forgiveness in Christ underfoot when she doesn't preach it, or looks to money or more members for salvation. There is only One Savior—and that is Christ. There is none other (Acts 4:12).

The true riches and wealth of God's people are not how many are present or how large the budget, but Christ and His Word. The number of members of a congregation or the size of the budget don't determine God's favor, His love, or even the extent of His blessing. Again—Christ does. If you have Christ, you have everything. If you don't have Christ, be worried—for then, you truly do have nothing, even if it seem like you have everything.

Remember the words of our Lord recorded earlier in St. Luke's Gospel? They are similar to those words of our Lord recorded in St. Matthew's Gospel in “The sermon on the Mount” (i.e. Matthew 5:3-8).

In St. Luke's Gospel, Jesus says, Blessed are you poor, For yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who hunger now, For you shall be filled. Blessed are you who weep now, For you shall laugh...(Luke 6:20-21).

Jesus is here speaking to His disciples, those who were hearing Him, those who were believing His very Word. Jesus is here speaking to you, to you who hear and believe His very Word. Such do His disciples do. They take seriously what God says, whether that Word be written in

Scripture or whether that same Word be preached in your ears. Those who do not take Christ's Word seriously show whose they are.

In referencing the poor, those who hunger, and those who now weep, Jesus does not mean those who are aren't able to make ends meet, those who are starving, or those who sorrow over the things they don't have. One is a member of God's kingdom, not on account of poverty, hunger, or sorrow, but on account of Jesus. There are many who are poor (without monetary/material possessions) that will still go to hell. There are many who are hungry and starving which will not dine at the heavenly banquet with the Lord. There are those who sorrow over the things of this world, but have no sorrow for their sin and do not seek God's mercy in Christ.

On the other hand, Christ says, too, **Woe to you who are rich, For you have received your consolation. Woe to you who are full, For you shall hunger. Woe to you who laugh now, For you shall mourn and weep...** (Luke 6: 24-25).

Here, too, it's not by having riches that one is truly rich. It's not in being full that one has true contentment. And its not in being emotionally high that one has lasting peace.

Emotions come and go. The stock market goes up and down. Money comes in and goes out. Food can be plentiful or scarce.

Jesus is drawing attention to the truth that the things of this life won't and don't save you. Having more or less doesn't determine your eternal destination. Christ does.

You who recognize and acknowledge your poverty before the Lord, you who hunger for God's goodness and mercy in Christ Jesus, and you who sorrow over your sin and believe the promises of God in Jesus—to you does He and will He give you the kingdom. You will be filled. And **your sorrow will be turned into joy** (John 16:20).¹

This is all because of Jesus. By His death on the cross, He has made satisfaction for all of your sin. And because He has, heaven is yours as you believe in His Word and promises.

But don't believe Christ's Word and promises, and His Words and promises of peace and forgiveness will be only trouble and judgement, not only now, but in the time to come.

Second Contrast—Hell and Heaven

The rich man in today's Gospel, the Jesus says, **died and was buried**. The account of the rich man's death is different from that of Lazarus, the poor man. Whereas the rich man died and was buried, **the poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side**. This difference

¹ **Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away** (Revelation 21:3-4).

in death of the two informs us another contrast found in today's sermon text—the destinations of each. The one was in Hades, in hell. The other was carried to Abraham's side—to heaven.

If one were to stop at this point in the reading, some might stop and think that the rich man went to hell because he was rich, and the poor man, Lazarus, went to heaven because he was poor. But this is far from the truth. Those who are rich, as well as those who are poor, will be found in both heaven and hell. It's not how much you have or don't have that determines your eternal destination. It's who you have.

Do you believe *in* Jesus? Do you believe that your sins are forgiven you because of Jesus? Do you believe that you can add nothing to or take anything away from what God has done for you in Christ—that Christ is your sufficiency before God? Do you believe that salvation is the very gift of God—given to you even now—a sinner--that you live? If so, then eternal life is yours.

Do you believe that you can add to or take away from what Jesus has already done for you—that Christ's work on the cross is somehow not your sufficiency before God? Do you believe that there is still something for you to do for your eternal well-being, or to be certain of your status before God? Do you believe that God doesn't forgive all of your sins because of their enormity or because you do the same thing over and over? Do you merely believe *about* Jesus, but don't believe that His Word and promises are for you? If so, then eternal life is not yet yours.

Jesus Christ has done it all. He has fulfilled all that God's commands of you. There's nothing left to be done. Christ has done it all. Forgiveness is yours. Thus does our Lord declare your sins forgiven. Thus does He give you the Sacraments of Holy Baptism and the Lord's Supper. Through these does our Lord give you forgiveness and keep you in the faith.

There can't be anything left undone if all is already done. Whether you're rich or poor, these don't change the faith of the heart. Wealth or poverty neither make a Christian or a non-Christian. It's Christ that does. And it's through faith that one either has the certainty of heaven or the surety of hell.

This the contrast between the rich man and Lazarus. The rich man lived in unbelief. Lazarus lived by faith. How else could the one end up in Hades, in hell, and the other be at Abraham's side in heaven?

In unbelief, the rich man ended up in hell. In unbelief, the rich man had no concern for helping Lazarus in his needs. He ignored him. He cared more about himself than his neighbor. And by doing so, his unbelieving selfish heart made itself known—and he reaped its reward.

So also will the same happen to all who in unbelief show no care and compassion for neighbor today. Faith demonstrates itself in love to neighbor. Where there is faith in the heart, there will be service to another. A heart that is cold to another is a faithless heart. It is a heart that does not show the mark of God's love.

In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother. For this is the

message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another, not as Cain who was of the wicked one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his works were evil and his brother's righteous. Do not marvel, my brethren, if the world hates you. We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death. Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth (1 John 3:10-18).

Only to the Christian is heaven promised—because of Christ. The nonChristian, however, seeks another way. He doesn't heed the Word, and wants to believe for himself what he wants, not that which God gives to believe.

Such is the difference between the believer and the nonbeliever. The believer takes God at His Word. The nonbeliever does not. And the difference is that of heaven and hell—the one the place of eternal peace and joy with God; the other, the place of God's wrath, judgment, and torment, from which there is no escape.

Third Contrast—Unbelief and Belief

This leads us to the final contrast of today's text that we'll note today. The first was the contrast between the rich man and Lazarus—the contrast between wealth and poverty, riches and lack. A second contrast was that of hell and heaven—the rich man was to suffer anguish for eternity in Hades, whereas Lazarus was comforted for all time in heaven. Now we come to a third contrast—that between unbelief and belief, and specifically, *in the Word*.

Just as Jesus had quoted Abraham as saying, **They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them and If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead**, so did the Pharisees to whom Jesus was speaking have the Law and the Prophets.

In other words, the people of Jesus' day had the Word of the Lord read in their hearing. The same Pharisees and Scribes who mocked Jesus for eating with sinners and tax collectors had the Word of God. But they didn't hear it. They didn't believe it.

Thus is Jesus rebuking them for their unbelief. In addition, Jesus Himself is the Word of God incarnate, the Word of God made flesh (John 1:14). They weren't listening to Him. And not listening to Jesus is not listening to God.

In the account Jesus told of the rich man and Lazarus, the one went to Hell, the other—to heaven. This was not because one had money and the other didn't. The rich man went to hell because of his unbelief. He claimed that Abraham was his father. But he didn't believe the Holy Scriptures, for as Jesus says, **in the Scriptures...you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me (John 5:39).**

Moses and the Prophets are a reference to the Old Testament. These testify of Jesus, the very same Jesus made known in the New Testament. Him you are to hear. And Him you are to believe. This the rich man did not do. And this is what the rich man was afraid his brothers would not do. That's why he wanted Lazarus to go warn his brothers. He wanted to warn them of what was to come if they continued in their unbelief.

But to the rich man did Abraham say, They **have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them and If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.**

Jesus says the same to the Pharisees and Scribes of this day. Jesus did rise from the dead. And if you don't believe the Scriptures, God's very Word, so will you remain in that unbelief, for Jesus is risen, Alleluia! And yet you still don't believe.

But thanks be to God, it is through those same Scriptures that God makes your salvation known—Jesus the Christ. That's all we have. That's all we've got. But that's all that we need. Amen.