



THE FIRST SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

June 10, 2012

The Gospel Reading: Luke 16:19-21

There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day: And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores, And desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried; And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame. But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented. And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence. Then he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house: For I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment. Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent. And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.

Sermon Text: First John 4:16-21

And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him. Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love. We love him, because he first loved us. If a man say, I love God, and hateth his

brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also.

Fellow Redeemed in Christ,

In our Gospel reading for today, our Lord relates to us the story of a rich man who lacked no material blessing. He lived in a beautiful home, enjoyed good health, wore the most expensive clothes, ate the best food and drank the finest wines.

He most likely lived his daily life and conducted his business affairs in accordance with the laws of his community. He was very prosperous, was well respected by his peers and he probably had a great many friends.

He certainly did not suffer from a lack of self-esteem.

Yes, he possessed every physical comfort of earthly life. And so, as far as this world was concerned, it seemed he wanted for nothing.

But in reality, he was truly lacking in the one thing needful.

For while he is not described in our text as a criminal or an outcast from society, as was the impenitent thief who was crucified with Jesus, the rich man was yet a great sinner. For in his life he showed love neither to God nor to his fellow man.

He remained unrepentant in his sin of lovelessness and so after death he reaped the harvest of that which he had sown during his life on earth. He found himself in great anguish, suffering the torments of hell.

All his fame and fortune, all his select friends and all his careful obedience to the moral and civil laws of his community could not save him from the punishment his unrepentant sin, his lovelessness, had brought him.

And so our Gospel reading for today presents to us an earnest warning.

For according to our corrupt and sinful nature, we too are inclined to lead loveless lives.

Let us examine ourselves in the pure light of God's Truth...

Have we found ourselves growing impatient with others, seeking the fulfillment of our own will and desires above all else, even the will of our Heavenly Father?

Have we demanded our own way over against that which we know would best benefit our neighbor?

Have we, like the rich man of our Gospel reading, ignored the plight of those in need when we know full well we could do something to alleviate his suffering and need?

Do we find ourselves envious of our neighbor, speaking ill of him, even desirous of his downfall and taking pleasure when evil befalls him?

If we are honest with ourselves and God, we must confess, we are all guilty of opposing love and sinning in these ways.

Yes, we must admit, based on our own sinful thoughts, words and deeds, we are all deserving of the same terrible fate of the rich man who found himself in the torments of hell.

You see, with the guilty stain of our sins upon us, no one, **absolutely not a single one of us**, can avoid the punishment in hell we deserve.

Our fame and fortune cannot save us.
Our friends cannot save us.

Nor can we save ourselves, even though we might live our lives in strict adherence to civil and moral law. For as the Scripture tell... we were "all dead in trespasses and sins" and what person among us has ever known a dead man able to do anything for himself?

No, dear friends, the only thing we rightly deserve is the righteous wrath of God and eternal torment in hell.

As the Word of God reveals: "...there is no difference, for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:22b-23)

But, God does not want *anyone* to suffer the eternal torments of hell. Rather He wants all people everywhere to repent of their sins and come unto the knowledge of, and receive by faith alone the unmerited saving grace of God in Christ Jesus.

Casting aside as sin any thought of merit or imagined worthiness on our part, in true sorrow and with a contrite heart, then, let us repent of all our sins.

Then in simple faith, lets us believe, receive and firmly grasp and accept the precious gift of the forgiveness of our sins and our redemption, which has been purchased for us, yea, for the whole world, and not with gold or silver, but with the precious innocent blood of Jesus Christ.

For Jesus Christ is the only Way to escape the condemnation and eternal punishment we deserve. Only by the grace of God through faith in the full atonement of our sins by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the very Lamb of God, may we obtain the forgiveness of our sins, salvation and eternal life in heaven.

As we read in Ephesians 2:8-9,

“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God; Not of works, lest any man should boast.”

And so, mankind must rightly abandon any notion of salvation in any other and receive by grace alone through faith alone, the free gift of the forgiveness of his sins, life and salvation found only in Christ Jesus.

For it is only through the suffering and death of Jesus on the cross of Calvary, only through the shedding of the innocent blood of the Lamb of God, that the whole world is cleansed and redeemed from sin, death and the power of the Devil.

In I John 3:16 we read,

“hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down His life for us...”

And so, dear ones, as we have come to know and believe the love God has for us, which was manifest in His Son, Jesus Christ, let us examine and take to heart the exhortation of our text.

Let us live in Christian-Christ-like-love toward God and our neighbor, recognizing and praising God with thankful and humble hearts for:

Firstly, The Source of Christian Love,
Secondly, How such Christian love manifests itself, and
Thirdly, The blessings of life lived in Christian love.

The question has been asked, “Can’t an unbeliever exhibit love? After all, don’t most of us know someone who is not a Christian and yet they exhibit acts of love toward their family and friends?”

The answer to this question is yes, unbelievers can and do often exhibit a type of love.

For there is a kind of love, or natural affection, with which each sinful human being is equipped by nature, at birth.

And, admittedly, this natural affection which the unbeliever exhibits for his family, friends, and society as a whole is often valuable and impressive to both the believing and unbelieving world.

However, this natural affection is not Christian love. For this natural affection does not have its origin in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. And as a result it tends to be misguided and self-serving in its aim and final goal.

No, true Christian love is and can be expressed *only* by those who have come to be reconciled with God through faith in Jesus Christ.

For Christian love flows from God's own love for us and is experienced by the believer through faith in Christ, created within the heart of the believer by the Holy Spirit.

As we read in Galatians 5:22,

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance.”

The expression of natural affection on the part of the unbeliever, on the other hand is worked by the Law of God written in his heart.

In Romans 2:14-15 we read,

“For when the Gentiles which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these having no the law, are a law unto themselves; which show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts the meanwhile accusing or else excusing one another.”

The natural affection of the unbeliever, produced by the demand of obedience to the Law of God written in his heart does, indeed, according to the divine providence of our good and gracious God, benefit the welfare of the Christian.

For it allows for the maintenance of a civil and relatively peaceful society and it may even produce what seems to be acts of charity toward others. But again, these are not acts of true Christian love. They are, rather, self-deceiving, self-serving and thus, self-condemning as well.

Now those who profess to be Christians; we who by faith hold fast to the unmerited forgiveness of our sins and the sure hope of eternal life in Jesus Christ, we will manifest true Christian love in our lives.

For the fount and source of Christian love and Christian life is God's own pure love manifested in our redemption from sin and death.

We will walk in true Christian love for God and our neighbor.

True Christian love will show its presence in our lives by the denial of self, shunning all that is sin, and rendering humble service to God and our neighbor.

For where there is true faith, there also will be true Christian love.

For saving faith is active faith. Saving faith always produces good works. In fact it cannot be prevented from producing good works which flow from the work of the Holy Spirit in the heart of the believer.

And so, blessed are all true Christians, living in Christian love. For as our text tells us, God is love, and if we as children through faith in Christ Jesus live in love towards God and our fellow man as a result of that faith, we live in God, and God lives in us.

What a wonderful blessing. Think about that... God lives in us.

This being so, we have no more reason to be terrified by the awful threatening of the Law. For Christ has fulfilled the Law perfectly for us. Out of love, through His suffering and death, He willingly paid the full ransom of our souls from hell. His victory over sin, death and the power of the Devil is ours as God's children and joint-heirs with Christ.

And so, dear ones, what reason do we have to fear our own deaths or the coming of the end of this world?

Are we not Christ's?

Hasn't God promised to work all things together for good to them that love God?

Hasn't He promised to return for us Himself, to gather us all to Himself and take us with Him to mansions which He Himself has specially prepared for us?

Yes, yes, and again yes!

In Christ then boldly, fearlessly, and with great joy and blessed anticipation we can look forward to the coming of our Lord!

And while we wait, longing for His return, let us not be idle nor given to sin. Rather let us be busy bringing others to Christ through the personal witness of His almighty power and love in our lives in both word and deed.

Love is patient. Love is kind. Love isn't jealous. It doesn't brag or get conceited. It isn't indecent. It isn't selfish. It doesn't plan to hurt anyone. It doesn't delight in evil, but is happy with the truth. It bears everything, hopes for everything, endures everything. Love never dies.

Dear Ones,

We love Him because He first loved us. So let the love of Christ and the light of the Holy Spirit's work in your hearts shine forth brightly and be made manifest in glad obedience to the Commandments of God and in acts of sincere Christian love toward your fellow man, knowing that yours is the sure inheritance of eternal life by grace alone, through faith alone in Christ Jesus.

And now, may the peace of God, the love of Christ and the communion of the Holy Spirit keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen