**Hear Moses and the Prophets**

 **Luke 16:19-31**

Our text for meditation is the Gospel lesson read earlier as recorded by the evangelist St. Luke.

We pray Luther's Prayer before the sermon: Eternal God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, give us Your Holy Spirit who writes the preached Word into our hearts. May we receive and believe it and be cheered and comforted by it in eternity. Glorify Your Word in our hearts and make it so bright and warm that we may find pleasure in it, through Your Holy Spirit think what is right, and by Your power, fulfill the Word, for the sake of Jesus Christ, Your Son our Lord. Amen.

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

Have you ever wondered why we are to be doing evangelism? If you pay close attention, you hear all sorts of stories about how the Missouri Synod is shrinking, and it is indeed getting smaller. If you will go back in history and look, one of the greatest periods of growth in the Missouri Synod was the mid-40s to through the 50s.

What were the reasons. First, people had more babies per family - that helps. Take the family then with an average of 5 children versus today in which families have an average of 1.2 children, and you can see that there are some issues going on.

But even taking that into account, there was more evangelism going on, people were reaching out with the Gospel to those around them. Why? Why then, and why not now?

Did you listen to our text? We could spend a long time examining this text and all the things going on here, but I’d like to use this text as the reason for evangelism, and then a simple formula for doing evangelism.

It is plain that we have lost the primary reason for doing evangelism. And it is right there in our text. *The rich man also died and was buried, and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and l saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. And 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.'*

Did you catch it? The rich man died and went to hell, in the Greek it is called Hades. He was there suffering, in torment, in great anguish. Is that a good reason for evangelism? Do you believe in a place called hell, where unbelievers will go and suffer eternally in torment and anguish? Jesus speaks about it – declares it is so.

If you believe the Word of Jesus, you believe in hell. Of course, there is the other option, some people make up their own version of Christianity, they do not believe there is such a place as hell. They do not believe that a “loving God” would send someone to everlasting torment. It is a nice sentiment, but it is based upon nothing more than feelings and the false teaching of the world.

On the other hand, there was poor Lazarus, he also had *died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side.* That is, he was taken up into heaven.

I suppose we must address a simple, but oft used misinterpretation of this text. There are some who use this to teach that the poor go to heaven and the rich to hell. Sorry, that’s not at all what was spoken about here. There is nothing in our text that being rich with being evil. There is also nothing that says that being poor is good.

Jesus is telling a parable, and the key to understanding why the poor man went to heaven, is in his name, Lazarus. Lazarus means, “God is my help or comfort.”

There will be rich and poor in heaven. There will be rich and poor in hell. Some of those which you and the world have equated with being good neighbors and some that you may think are awful neighbors will be in hell. Some of your good neighbors and some that you may think are awful neighbors will be in heaven.

In the most simple terms, those who trust in God as their help and comfort will be in heaven.

Earthly blessings do not reveal how one stands before God, although there are those who teach such things. Neither does poverty reveal how one stands before God, although there are some who also teach that. You cannot measure the love of God for you by anything you accomplish, or by the size of your bankbook, or the well-being of your family, or any other outward sign.

If you want to know the measure of God’s love for you, you must look only to the cross of Jesus Christ. When you consider the price God’s own Son took upon His own flesh to pay for your sins, and the sins of the whole world, then you know of your relationship to God.

Now notice something very important – it is not your relationship to God, but God’s love for you. What I mean is this, it is not based upon how much you love God, but God’s love for you.

Do you believe that you have not given help to the poor Lazarus’s that have been laid upon your doorstep? In fact, you probably did not even notice them? Do you repent of that sin and in God’s work of redemption to free you from your sins? There is your salvation. Christ’s work brings you eternal life in heaven.

Is God your help and your comfort? Are you a Lazarus? Not poor, but a poor miserable sinner who trusts in Christ alone, for salvation alone, by God’s grace alone.

As Peter proclaims, “there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." (Acts 4:12)

In torment and suffering, the rich man begs for assistance, but Lazarus is not even allowed to ease his torment in hell with just a drop of water on his fingertip. The rich man though, now suffering great anguish, does get worried about his family. *'I beg you, father, to send him to my father's house— for I have five brothers —so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment.' But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.' And he said, 'No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' He said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.' "*

If someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent. “No!” is the reply. No gimmicks! No tricks! No fancy evangelism techniques! It isn’t the right music! Not the right preacher! It isn’t miracles! It isn’t some special program!

But there is something, 'If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.' If they reject the Word of God, they will also reject anything extraordinary.

Dear friends in Christ, we have lost the urgency to do evangelism. We do not believe that there is a place called hell, where unbelievers will spend eternity in horrendous torment. Yet, in this text, and throughout Scripture, we are reminded again and again that there is such a place – and that those who reside there for eternity will be in anguish, suffering in a manner we cannot even begin to imagine.

What is more, there are people all around us who are going to suffer such a fate. Some are our friends and neighbors, all those who do not trust and hope in God as their comfort. Maybe they trust in themselves. Maybe they trust that since they have all they want for this life, that is all they need. Some believe, rather fatalistically, life is all there is – then you die. Others believe that God is a god of love who would never send anyone to hell – so why worry.

You dear friends know the truth. What is more, you have been given a valuable tool to use, Moses, the prophets, the evangelists and apostles. Yes, you have the greatest tool in the world, the Scriptures – the very Word of God. This Word, we are promised, will not return empty and void, but will accomplish what God desires.

You are in the same boat they are in. You are in the world, and your flesh appeals to you. Like the rich man, you are easily tempted to trust in yourself and the things of this world.

I know how easily the desires of the flesh entice. It is so easy to get caught up in making family work, enjoying even the most simple pleasures of a day on the lake, getting the garden in, keeping the weeds at bay, and just getting a couple hours for myself.

Yes, morning devotions and evening prayers get buried in between commercials on TV, cause they would take time away from the latest episode of Blue Bloods, Master Chef, or The Voice – after all, tonight is the final vote.

You and I are sinners, just like our relatives, friends and neighbors. They need exactly what you have come to receive today, the forgiving grace of God, purchased by His beloved Son on the cross, and delivered to you in Word and Sacrament.

Who are you going to tell? Do not do it because you need to be about evangelism, doing your part. But tell them about the grace of God which is ***your comfort and hope***. Proclaim to them the peace of God which passes all understanding, the quiet calm that pervades your soul when you have basked in the riches of God’s love to you as you gather in His house with your brothers and sisters in Christ.

The lesson of this parable is simple, trust neither your outward blessedness, nor the troubles that plague your life. Jesus Christ, and Him crucified is the only thing you need remember to know God’s love for you.

Furthermore, it is only in the Word of God that your faith is strengthened and built, for that Word points only to Christ. It is in Christ that you trust and hope. Therefore, at every opportunity, receive that Word - receive Christ - spoken into your ears, eaten with your mouth, and drunk with your lips as He comes to you. And invite others to join us, that they too might share in your hope and comfort to their everlasting joy. In the name of Jesus. Amen.