

Sermon for the Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost September 28, 2025 jj
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Godliness with contentment is great gain, Paul wrote to Timothy. But that gain is not what most people in this world have in mind. In fact, that which you intend to gain as a disciple of Jesus Christ is ridiculed and reviled by the world as threatening, hateful, divisive. Satan wouldn't have had it any other way.

Our Savior told a story about two men. The rich man and Lazarus were vastly different in appearance. One had the finest clothes to wear and the other only had rags. One ate gourmet meals and the other went hungry with longing for scraps. One had the care of the best physicians possible if he ever had the need, and the other only had dogs to lick his open sores, whether he wanted them to do that or not. He was at the gate of the rich man, not because he could choose where to sit and beg, rather he was laid there by others, and no one offered to move him somewhere better. Who out of the two had the great gain? My vote would have gone to the rich man every time! He could even say God was blessing him, because faring sumptuously on all the food you want, dressed in the nicest purple clothes you could buy—we can call those blessings of Daily Bread, as the Lord's Prayer is taught to us in the Catechism—and the number of those blessings was many times over what he needed day to day. What a vast difference there is between the rich man and Lazarus and the daily bread they had received in their earthly lives.

The chasm between them was more than a physical appearance divide, though. At their death, a whole other world of difference was suddenly unveiled. The rich man, who believed not in God but drowned in the insatiable craving of his own abundance was now separated by fire from Lazarus, of whom Jesus said was carried by angels to heaven, to the open embrace of the spiritual ancestor of all those

who believe in God's promises, father Abraham himself.

Despite the impossible to bridge separation, Jesus reveals a conversation that was able to occur between the rich man and Abraham. Guess what? The rich man is still only thinking of himself: Send Lazarus to soothe me! I'm in real need now! This is the most hideous existence of torment that mankind has ever dared to imagine. Even a little water on my tongue would do at least a little good. I need God now that things aren't going so well for me!

Isn't that how we are at times? Can't Lazarus help me? You know, his name means God helps me, but there are times when I don't think He will. Isn't that how the saying goes? It's so popular that people think it's from the Bible, God helps those who help themselves. Nope! I'm stuck, and I don't know what to do, and now I'm all alone! Dogs will come and lick my sores, but what help does that give? Very little! I don't even have enough strength in me to shoo them away. The meager attention that the dogs are showing me is at least greater than what I get from the rich man who knows my name! I am the victim of the most degrading, humiliating life experience mankind can imagine.

Did you notice something? For all the differences that exist between the two, the rich man and Lazarus, both during earthly life and in the time hereafter, there is something they hold very strikingly in common! They both have to endure times of suffering! Both experience a dramatic reversal from one extreme to the other. Neither one could avoid their hardship all the time, that is to say, before and after death. This teaches us that there is a time to suffer sometime, not because God wanted it that way,

but rather it's thanks to sin's curse upon the world. I think that is where our delusion, yours and mine, is most likely to be found. The Apostle John begins his letter, If we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves... well, he could very well have added, if we think we can have all blessings of God without the cross of hardships, we are deceiving ourselves just as much. That's not just how things are once Adam and Eve get expelled from Eden. Like the rich man, we can hurry up and get all our blessings in now, and I can worry about the eternal torment and separation from God in my future suffering. Or like Lazarus, we can face suffering and the cross now, endure hardship, even when it seems like God is fully turning His back on me in this life, only to have the angels whisk me off to enjoy Father Abraham's legendary hug, and feast at the Father's unlimited banquet.

Good now, and bad later; or bad now, and good later? How we answer that basic question will determine what Jesus had said at another time: Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. Or as Paul wrote to Timothy, be generous and ready to share, thus building a foundation for the future, so that you can take hold of that which is truly life. True life is with Jesus, which will include suffering, cross and all that this world avoids. The deceptive life, that which may promise but cannot give life, is bound up in many senseless and harmful desires that are very attractive to this world, very short-term when you talk about results, but it is a craving designed to make you wander away from the faith if you let it.

How will that dramatic reversal happen for you? How will you be snatched up out of your self-centered fake religion and ushered to Abraham's feast table? How will the infinite Grand Canyon chasm be crossed? No one can cross over after their death. No one from heaven, not Lazarus, not even the angels, can bridge that gap and come to the rescue. The time to believe in Jesus is now, while we're still

alive. We cannot put it off like the rich man assumed he could. He could have helped Lazarus, who sat at the gate of his own property. That would have demonstrated that he believed in the God who set aside His own heavenly riches to come down to lift us out of the poverty of our sin. The ultimate reality for the rich man and Lazarus was completely the opposite from the reality they each faced during their earthly life.

You have a deep-seated desire within you to be self-reliant, to be independent of God. You were born with this desire, and the devil always turns your attention to money and many other temporary, fleeting things of this present life. For he wants you to believe that you can get by in life without God's help, so that then you become easy prey to fall into the hands of the evil one. Even though he was defeated forever and God cast him out of heaven, Satan can still bring you down to hell with him, and he knows his time of opportunity to do that is short.

Listen to Moses and the Prophets, says Father Abraham. That means remember and take to heart what the Bible tells you. In the words written once for all by those certain inspired human authors, God has bestowed upon you the incredible blessing of His Word. He speaks His tender love and comfort to you through that same Word, making you confident in the one who did actually rise from the dead and proclaim victory for you—Christ your Savior! One and only one could, and did, bridge that cavernous spiritual gap between those who are condemned and those who are saved. Jesus, only-begotten Son of the Father, accomplished the impossible when He came down from heaven and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary and was made man, all truths that we confess in the Nicene Creed. For miserable Lazarus, and also for you, dear child of God, Jesus has not only relieved your pains and sufferings that you experience in this world, but He has promised most importantly that you will not pay what your sins against God have

deserved. He paid the final price, and bridged that gap, and Jesus paved the way for the angels to bring you away from those flames of torment to the blessed rest of everlasting life.

And so you have hope that came to you from invisible heaven, made visible in Christ your Savior, and delivered to you by God's Word so that it becomes an absolute certainty for you and all who believe in Jesus. You have God's love as your precious gift and that love is seen in Jesus your Savior, who gave up all He had, shunned not only the riches of earth but the entire wealth of heaven and became obedient to death, even death on a cross—and all for your sake. God knows that you are a sinner and that you deserve punishment, but with Jesus standing in your place, He no longer looks upon you with punishment and condemnation. Instead He abundantly showers His love on you for the sake of Jesus, who kept the law and suffered its punishment for you. Jesus gives you His very own Body and Blood, which was the price He paid for your sins, in order that you may join with Him and the entire unseen heavenly host in praising the one who gives you salvation even now, both for your body and for your soul.

In this glorious truth of your forgiveness and salvation is found the true mystery—godliness and contentment that yields the greatest gain. Your name, like Lazarus, is written in heaven, nothing else can hurt you or even annoy you anymore. It all pales in comparison, and what we're left with is righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness. Pursue these, and fight the good fight of the faith, holding on to Jesus the source of true life. Depend on Him for everything, and not on yourself. Abraham's embracing arms stand open for you, and the table is set, and a taste of the future feast awaits you here on the Altar.

In the Name of the Father and of the ☩ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.