

Luke 16:19-34

Grace, peace, and mercy from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Appearances are often deceiving.

Take today's gospel as exhibit one.

Jesus tells us a story about a rich man who had nice clothes, fine purple clothes and linens. The very best you could get. It is like having a pricy custom-made suit.

He eats well too. Not just three-square meals a day. Jesus tells us he feasted every day. More than that. He feasted scrumptiously. Wait there is more, he feasted scrumptiously every day. Jesus is really pouring it on. That is like eating a gourmet meal, prepared by a master chef, not just for special occasions but each and every day.

Now let us consider where the rich man lived. Jesus says he had a gate. This may suggest he lived on a very big estate with a mansion. A gated community comes to mind with the purpose of keeping the riff-raff out. One's mind, especially in Jesus' day would suggest God rewarded him for his good behavior. He kept the law.

Let us now consider Poor man. It appears that he not blessed. He had to have sinned in a big way to find himself as part of the Rif-raff that lived right outside the gate of the rich man. He has to be at the gate of the rich man because it is a good place to beg. He is covered sores which the dogs come to lick, he has nothing to eat, He is so helpless. He is in pretty bad shape. And it looks like the rich man does not turn his eyes to him to offer help or share some of his blessings to help this poor man who outside his gate. Like he is turned in on himself. Sounds like Luther's classic definition of sin.

Jesus sets before us a rather stark contrast. A contrast of blessing and curses. The rich man in expensive purple clothes, the poor man covered with sores. The Rich man feasting scrumptiously every day, the poor man longing for scrapes from the rich man's table which is not even coming. The poor man is living on the wrong side of the gate. Will anyone help Lazarus? The rich man certainly is not willing to help or lift a finger to help. In a human way it would seem pretty easy to see who is blessed and who is cursed. Appearances are deceiving.

While it appears, the poor man has nothing going for him, in fact there is one thing going for him. Did any of you catch it? Jesus gives him a name. In many of the

stories Jesus tells the characters are often nameless. Here Jesus names him Lazarus. Lazarus translates to “My God Helps.” As we can certainly see Lazarus does not receive any help from the Rich Man. It looks like no one is helping poor Lazarus. But God was helping Lazarus.

And God does help Lazarus. When Lazarus dies look what happens. Look happens to Lazarus in contrast to the Rich man. The Poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side. The Rich Man also died and was buried. Now look who is blessed and who is cursed.

The tables have turned. The poor man, Lazarus is listed first. And the Rich man after him. Listen to the description: The poor man is carried by the angels to Abraham's side. That is a beautiful description of a blessed death of a believer. As for the Rich Man, he just dies and is buried. No mention of Angels, No Abraham's Side. Just buried. Oh, I am sure the rich man could afford a lavish funeral, but it is not worth mentioning here. In fact, Jesus says the rich man ends up in Hades, or Hell and He is in torment. Now for the first time the rich man lifts up His eyes and is looking outside of himself. He sees Lazarus in Paradise at Abraham's side. “Father Abraham, Have Mercy on Me. Send Lazarus to dip his finger in cool water and place on the tip of my tongue to cool it off. I am in torment here in the flames.” Request denied. Abraham says, “The chasm has been fixed. Remember child how you received the good things and how Lazarus received the bad things? Lazarus is now being comforted here and now you are in anguish. The chasm is fixed and there is no crossing over.”

The Rich man now finds himself in a different place. There was a wall that keeps the Rich man out and now the rich man finds a fixed chasm that he cannot get to heaven. Not only that, but no one can also get to the rich man to help him get a drop of water to cool his tongue.

This is the only place in the Bible that describes Hell like this. A place of anguish and torment. Now he realizes it is too late for him. But his brothers just might have a chance. Send Lazarus to warn my living brothers, they would believe someone if he raised from the dead. Again, request denied. Abraham tells him, “They Have Moses and the Prophets, let them listen to them.” But if someone returns to from the dead they will repent.” No, If they do not listen to Moses and Prophets, neither will they believe someone raised from the dead.”

In other words, They have the Scripture, which at that time was the OT. Here the prophets warn, warn, and warn about being turned in on oneself like Amos in our

first reading. They warn about the desire of riches and wealth which can so easily become the god in your life. The respond, "God's has blessed us, our nation is strong," Remember appearances can be deceiving. In Amos' preaching the poor and widows were being neglected. The nation was rotting.

They warn about forgetting that God in his grace is the source of every blessing in your life. In fact, everything you have is from God. They warn against neglecting your neighbor where you may be that very way that God uses you to be that channel of God's grace and help in their lives.

Today we add the new Testament to the Scriptures. Here too we are warned against these very same things. 2<sup>nd</sup> lesson? They call us to repent and turn from our folly. Whether we are rich or poor we all fall short in helping our neighbor and in short, we need God's Help to raise us from sin and brokenness.

We are unable to get up on our own and find ourselves lying outside the gated community called Heaven.

Here is the Good News. There is a rich man inside this gate that has come to help you. When came His appearances could be pretty deceiving. "For you, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so you by His poverty might become rich." Yes, Jesus Christ the eternal Son of God came down from heaven, came to the place where we live, born in a barn and he suffered and died for you, for your sins. Yes, Jesus Christ emptied himself for you. He suffered anguish and torment. His body was covered with the sore and strips of the whip. They threw the purple robe on Him and mocked Him. His hands and feet and side were wound on the cross for our transgressions. On that cross He cried, "I thirst." He died and was buried. By all appearances it does not look like victory of salvation won for us. But it is, for the cross is God's salvation for those who believe. All of this He did for you while you lie helpless dying in your sins. Because of this Christ has opened the gate of the Kingdom of God to all believers.

This is the infinitely rich grace of God that when you die you who trust God's promise will be carried by the angels to Heaven to be with Abraham and all the Saints. Oh, yes and this, Someone did rise from the dead and it is the crucified and buried Jesus. The Tomb did not hold Him. Now ascended into heaven he lives forever. And because of all of this God gives us all the Help we need.

And this too, God has given you a sign that He has helped you and will help you through your faith journey. It is your baptism. He has put his saving name on you, claiming you as His own. Our help is in the name of the Lord we shout out, "amen,

and it is true for me! Your baptism has placed on you the name of Lord, “Father, Son and Holy Spirit.” And God has given you a name. You belong to Him.

In Christ you have the true riches, you have a name, and the assurance of the Lord’s presence in every trial and struggle. And it does not get better than that.

The peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Amen.