

**A Sermon for the First Sunday after  
Trinity, June 23, 2019**

*The Epistle, 1 John 4:7-21 - The Gospel,  
St. Luke 16:19-31*

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**A. The Gospel**

1. The season of Trinity, which runs until Advent, is a long teaching season. We just finished the portion of the year that takes us through the revelation God in Christ from the birth of Jesus to his Ascension, to the coming of the Spirit, and to celebration of God as Trinity. Now we enter into a season in which we reflect on the implication of this revelation.

2. We begin with a down-to-earth story of a rich man and a poor man named Lazarus. The rich man is clothed luxuriously and eats well every day. Lazarus is diseased and has nothing to eat. The rich man has a fence and a gate that keeps Lazarus away from his house.

3. The situations are reversed in death. The poor man is in a state of blessedness called Abraham's bosom—what Jesus referred to elsewhere as Paradise. Now he is enjoying the feast. The rich man is tormented in "Hades"—the intermediate state of the damned. The circumstances are exactly reversed. Now he is outside the gate, gazing longingly at the feast.

4. The story is clearly meant as a warning. It calls to mind Jesus' description of judgment. "Inasmuch as ye did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me" (Matthew 25:40). It also calls to mind the teaching of the epistle, "He who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, how can he love God, whom he has not seen?"

**B. The application to our lives**

1. Such teaching is sobering and a bit scary, but what are we supposed to do with it? Who is the rich man, and who is Lazarus? The gate in the story is a key to understanding the application to our lives. It was a gate built by the rich man precisely to separate himself from the dangers and needs of the world around him. Lazarus was outside the gate and, therefore, outside of the rich man's sphere of concern.

2. This is a natural human tendency. We built gates in our lives; we establish divisions between ourselves and others; we decide who is on the inside that we will care for and who is on the

outside. If we define certain others as being outside of our gate, we can justify our lack of concern for them—perhaps saying that they deserve what they have gotten, or perhaps just because we are afraid to get involved.

3. There is a communion hymn that expresses God's love for us in terms of another gate. "O Saving Victim opening wide the gate of heaven to man below." Our sins separate us from God. They alienate from his presence—leave us outside his gate. God sent his Son into the world to live and die for us precisely to open the gate and bring us back into his presence. In the Eucharist, God shares with us the riches of his grace.

4. The idea expressed by the parable is that God expects us to adopt this same perspective toward others that we see in need around us. We have received an abundance of grace from God. We are called to share this grace and love with others. Or, more accurately, if we have experienced grace, we will be naturally moved to share that grace with others. Our lack of love for others, shown in tangible works of love, indicate that we have not really experienced grace.

**C. The Trinity and the sharing of love.**

1. God is Trinity because God is a relationship of overflowing love. The Father loves the Son, the Son loves the Father, and the Holy Spirit is the love that flows between them and then out from them into the world. The Church as the Body of Christ is both recipient and agent of this love. As the Epistle says, "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another." If we have received God's love through the gift of the Spirit, if our sins have been forgiven and God has set us free in various ways, then we will naturally want to share this experience of love with others. We will begin to open the gates we established and we will invite those outside to come in—just as God has opened his gate for us.

2. The rich man reflects God's final judgment on Old Testament Israel. The nation was supposed to be a light to lighten the Gentiles, but instead become selfish and concerned only about themselves. This is also a danger for the church. There is a tendency over time to become ingrown; to practice our religion as a way of separating ourselves from the world, rather than

practicing our religion as means of outreach and mission to the world.

#### **D. Two applications**

There are at least two applications of this parable for us today.

1. First, as individuals. We are called to serve others for Christ. This means being aware of and responsive to the needs we see around us—with specific attention to the needs laid “at our gate.” The rich man’s condemnation was not his failure to solve world hunger, but his unwillingness to love the person right in front of him.

a. This does not mean we are called to empty our wallet for every homeless beggar. There is a danger of using money as the easy way out. The four-fold nature of poverty. The main need is for relational connection. Rather than “solving the homeless problem” we might decide to develop a relationship with one marginalized person.

b. The wounded are all around us. Many who look very rich are very poor. The main need is for relationships and community. Our main gift is of ourselves. Examine where we have built gates and begin to open them—and begin to walk outside of them yourself.

2. Second, as a church. We are called to bring people back into relationship with God. We should continually search for new ways to reach out to people who we might have seen as being outside of our gate. Our faith in Christ and our life of prayer has reconciled us to God and made us whole. We are called to share this experience with others.

We should stop think of ourselves as a church and start thinking of ourselves as a mission. The word church often carries the connotation that we are here in church doing things for our selves. Traditionalists often are tempted to build a sort of gate that separates us from the non Christian world “out there.” For our comfortable position in here, we condemn what is going on out there. A mission perspective looks at this differently. It sees those in the world who are lost as needing what we have, and it orients ministry around reaching out to them as Christ reached out to us.

#### **Conclusion**

We tend to think that those who are poor in various ways need those who are rich. But the rich man needed Lazarus. Lazarus was his

invitation to love. We need those in need whom God placed near us. They call us out of our selfishness, and into the activity of love. When we respond, they are for us a means of grace.

For, “he who love the not his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God, whom he has not seen? And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also.”