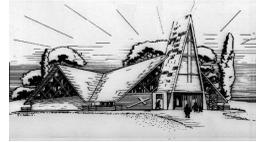




Free Evangelical Lutheran  
Synod in South Africa

## Sermon - 19<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 21C)

### We have Moses and the Prophets!



St. John's Lutheran Parish Shelly Beach

• The Word of God for this Sermon is written in Luke 16,19-31:

• **ESV** 19 "There was a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day.

• 20 And at his gate was laid (*thrown*) a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores,  
• 21 who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table. Moreover, even the dogs came and licked his sores.

• 22 The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried,

• 23 and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side.

• 24 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.'

• 25 But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that you have received your good things in your life, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish.

• 26 And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us.'

• 27 And he said, 'Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father's house-

• 28 for I have five brothers- so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment.'

• 29 But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.'

• 30 And he said, 'No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.'

• 31 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.'"

• *Let us pray: Come Holy Spirit, open our ears and our hearts and drive out all haughtiness and coldness towards others from our hearts and give us a new spirit of mercy and sharing with others of your good gifts! Amen.*

• **Dear Congregation in Christ!**

• Who could be so harsh not to help that poor man on his or her doorstep? All the poor man desired was some crumbs from the table of the rich man! But this rich man did not give him anything at all! He refused to give him the smallest piece of leftover bread! His dog had more mercy on the man than he had!

• Against whom does Jesus speak this parable?

• From the context [14] we have to conclude, that Jesus directed this at the Pharisees

who were “lovers of money”! So, is this all about learning that we should give to the poor else we would go to hell, like the rich man? On the surface, yes, it is true, a Christian who is so blatantly hardhearted that he would not even give left-over crumbs from his bread to anyone who would ask for it has probably got a faith that is dead. A faith without any mercy is dead! Without repentance such a person would go to hell!

• However, who is really accused by this? You see our old Self will easily find a way out of this! It will simply start to remember all the times it has helped someone poor. And then this Word of Jesus would only apply to others, not to my Self.

• That is why the Pharisees, against whom Jesus spoke many of these parables laughed at Jesus, when He spoke these. They were understanding these stories as to be applied on the surface only, as if it was only about material goods. They didn't understand these sayings of Jesus as parables. A parable uses an example of everyday life to drive home an issue concerning the kingdom of God!

• Why could they laugh-off Jesus according to their own understanding? Because they were the ones who could make a long list why this rich man was not like them in any way. They fasted more than anyone else- they made sure everybody knew this! That is, they were not feasting sumptuously every day. Can't be them! They tithed, gave the tenth of all their income- some were very strict with this- the people knew this! They were the forerunners when it came to almsgiving! Everyone knew this! This rich man could not be them.

• We have to realise that the Pharisees of all times, again, including our own Pharisees in our hearts, our old Selves, are very clever to hide their hypocrisy! They always give the outward impression of piety, helping the poor and making sure that all see it, and giving a lot of money to charity in such a way that the newspapers hear of it!

• So, this story of Jesus would just prove to all that they were not like that rich man, *if one understands it out of context, that is, against the true background of the Scriptures!* If its all about the so-called social gospel, if its all about not doing anything against the letter of the Law, the Pharisees come out shining before mankind! They are the ones making news headlines because they help so many and tithe so much and fast every week!

• But Jesus does not teach on the superficial outer level! He goes deeper. He goes to the deepest level of our selves, our hearts! Jesus goes to the heart of the matter when He says [15]: *“And He said to them, ‘You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God.’”* These are very stern words of Jesus! Pharisees look good on the outside, they are even exalted by the community, but God is not fooled by their display of piety. God is not impressed by them being popular amongst mankind! Jesus goes to the spiritual or godly meaning of the text which is the true “literal” or original meaning of the Holy Scriptures!

- What precisely is Jesus speaking of here? How do the Pharisees do their hypocrisy?
- This is where the parable for today exposes the inner workings of the pharasaic heart of all times!
- It is at the death of both Lazarus and the rich man that the great reversal takes place. Lazarus is most mercifully carried by angels to Abraham's bosom whilst the rich man is only buried! The rich man wakes up in hell, the place of torment, forever! However, we hear he knows Abraham as father. So he is a descendant of Abraham according to the flesh. He cries out for mercy, too late, but even in his torment he sees Lazarus as his servant. He tries to persuade Abraham to send Lazarus all the way to the place of torment just to cool down his tongue! Can you see the ultimate selfishness showing itself clearly! Its all about me!
- But Abraham does not listen to him. Instead he reminds him of what happened back on earth: "*Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish.*" The question is what good things did they receive?
- Abraham reminds him of the fact that Lazarus cannot come to him even if he wanted to, because a great chasm divides hell from the kingdom of God! Then the rich man starts begging for his brothers, family members, *still* closely connected to his Self, still mainly concerned about his own.
- Abraham's response is very important for the understanding of the whole passage [29]: "*They have Moses and the Prophets; let them bear them.*" Most significant that Abraham points him, and us, to Moses and the Prophets, the OT Scriptures.
- This finally exposes the rich man's heart, because he basically rejects the efficiency of these holy Scriptures, God's Word by rejecting what Abraham said when he says [30]: "*No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.*" What does he trust in? Signs and wonders! He despises the Word of God, the greatest gift of God given to the Pharisees! That is the greatest thing the Pharisees had received, but what were they doing with the gift of God?
- What did they do with Moses and the Prophets? Just like the rich man, they used it for their own benefit only! Everyday they assured themselves and others how righteous they were- they always turned it to favour their own piousness! They were never accused by the Law of God because they reinterpreted it at will. They turned it into their own "good thing"! But, on the last day they will be unmasked. Their hypocritical teaching will be exposed to the full! They won't get away with it.
- And they have also heard about the Gospel that was proclaimed in their ears

too, by Jesus Himself. Yet, they not only rejected it for themselves, they also rejected it that the poor in Spirit, the tax-collectors and sinners, those who desired to eat the “*crumbs falling of their table*”, those who desired to hear the Gospel, the Lazarus’s, that they receive *any of it!* Instead of handing out the greatest gift of God, His Law and Gospel, Moses and the Prophets, given to lead sinners to repentance and allowing them to eat of the bread of heaven, participating in Christ’s Word of forgiveness, they refused to hand out even the crumbs of that wonderful bread!

- They were the cause that Lazarus, which means ‘*one whom God helps*’ was starving to death of spiritual food!
- But God in His mercy saw the desire in spiritually poor Lazarus’ heart for the Gospel Word of God and therefore he was carried away by angels to His kingdom!
- This is what Jesus was teaching His disciples earlier, that they have all received a certain measure of the greatest gift of God, His Word which has the power to lead people to repentance and give them access to the ongoing feast in heaven. This gift of God should be shared. Just like with any gifts of God, but especially with this gift, we should not be stingy. This gift we should share abundantly and not use it to justify ourselves. Hand it out that others, who desire Christ, who are hungry for forgiveness, are justified and taught all that Christ has commanded His disciples to teach.
- Where Jesus is not believed, taught and confessed to be the fulfillment of Moses and the Prophets- where humanity or Israel or the Christian is believed to be able to fulfil this- a boastful spirit of self-justification takes over which ultimately abuses all good gifts of God to build up the Self before people!
- Where Jesus’ Word is believed, taught and confessed that He is indeed the fulfillment of Moses and the Prophets, old Adams are killed by the Law of God and new people of righteousness are born to finally eat at the table of the Lord. Lord, have mercy! Amen.
- *Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.* (<sup>ESV</sup> Eph 3,20-21).