**Trinity 1**

Luke 16:19-31

Rev. Andrew Eckert

First Sunday after Trinity

Our Savior Lutheran Church

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In studying the story of Lazarus and the Rich Man, we should keep in mind the two main points Christ is making: first, that rich people may make their blessings into an idol that robs them of faith and repentance; second, that the Word of God is sufficient in itself. On the first point, regarding the idolatry of riches, I have preached often enough lately, so I will concentrate on the second.

So I say to you: The Word is sufficient. The Word is enough to give us all the gifts the Spirit wants to give. The Word is effective for faith and salvation. It does not need something added to it. Although God in His wisdom adds water to the Word to create Baptism, and wine and bread for the Supper, these are at His command and institution. Whatever we add from our creativity does not add to the Word.

We see this in the story of Lazarus and the Rich Man. The Rich Man said to Abraham, “I *beg you, father, that you would send Lazarus to my father’s house, for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment.*” Abraham said, “*They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.*” The Rich Man said, “*No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent*.” But Abraham said, “*If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead*.”

Our natural mind disagrees with this. Of COURSE they will be more likely to believe if someone rises from the dead! Or so common sense thinks. But that is not the way things work spiritually.

If this is true of a resurrection from the dead, then it is true of all signs and miracles. They do not create or sustain faith. Only the Spirit works faith through the Word.

We Lutherans may get that, yet we still have that little voice inside us. We think that we need to add something to the Word to make it effective. So we think that we must display our good works to others, and that will make them have faith. Or we have to not offend people, and that will make them have faith. Or maybe we have to be persuasive enough. We have to give a witness that has a certain quality of winsomeness, whatever that is. But no, the thing that creates and sustains faith is the Spirit working in and with the Word, and only that.

We try to work around this by saying things that start with the words, “Yes, but . . .” “Yes, but if we offend them then we can push them away,” or “Yes, but if we don’t invite them the right way, they can’t hear the Word,” or “Yes, but if we are not loving enough they won’t want to come.” These are all ways of saying, “The Word is not enough. It needs our help.”

By all means, try not to offend. But offenses will happen, both given and taken. By all means, try to invite many people, and love them as best you can. But in the end, we have to listen to father Abraham: “If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded even if a someone rises from the dead.”

We can encourage people to hear the Word. We can try to lead them. We can extol the virtues of God’s House because the holy Word is there through which the Spirit works. We can be truly welcoming and loving, not only in appearance. A used car salesman can be welcoming and loving in appearance. We can surely do much better. Still, many will not hear the Word, even if we are as loving and perfect as the Lord Jesus. People even refused to hear Him, so they will also surely refuse to hear the Word from us.

Rather than despair because people seem to ignore the Word of God so much, take hope because the Spirit will most definitely save all those who were predestined from before the beginning of the world to be saved. He will not fail, even if it seems that we have failed.

So far I have been treating this passage as relates to us as speakers of the Word. But we also should take it to heart as hearers of the Word.

We are commanded to hold the Word sacred in itself, which means to listen to it for its own sake, because it is the sufficient and effective Word of God, not for some other reason. In the same way, we should not be loyal to a congregation because of friendship, events, styles of worship, or emotions we feel here. Instead be loyal because of the Word purely taught and preached. That is the one most important thing, the only ultimately needful thing for the Church.

Do we hold the Word sacred? Do we listen to it for its own sake? The Rich Man and his brothers did not. But notice how he calls Abraham, “Father” as if the Rich Man were a pious Jew. Notice also that Abraham says that the brothers HAVE Moses and the prophets. In other words, they were either regularly sitting in a pew (so to speak), or the Word was easily available to them.

They had the house of God, but they treated it as if it were not. They did not really listen to the Word. They did not deeply hunger for it.

We, who sit in the pews, should take warning, because a pew does not guarantee salvation. Are we repenting and believing because of the Word? Not because of some sign or some favorite thing we find here. Whatever other thing impressed us and persuaded us to be here, that would not be a good reason to be here, even if it were a resurrection from the dead.

For the Jews, God actually provided the sign of raising someone from the dead. He did it twice in the past, and twice in the future, and four times contemporary to the telling of this story. The prophets Elisha and Elijah each raised a person. Saints Paul and Peter each raised one. Christ raised three, including Lazarus, and then was also raised Himself. So the Jews had a heritage of resurrections in their Old Testament. They had opportunity to see people raised at the time of Christ and shortly after. Yet for many, it was not enough to create repentance and faith.

The sign of all signs was the Lord Christ showing Himself to witnesses, having conquered death. We who believe see by this sign that He has overcome sin in His own Body for us. He has purchased for us eternal life in resurrected bodies like His. We have all things because of Christ our Lord.

But if someone does not have faith, they disbelieve this sign. Or even if they are convinced it happened, they may not trust in Christ. They may treat the resurrection as no more than a near death experience. Near death experiences, even if they are genuine, do not in themselves lead to true faith. Often, people hear those stories and think that it proves there is life after death, or prove the existence of something vaguely spiritual. But without the Word, true faith in Christ does not happen.

We must make up our minds to listen to the sacred, sufficient Word. To do so is really to trust in God, who is the Speaker of the Word. This trust only comes through the Spirit’s work in us, not by our own decision or will.

So listen, and take to heart. Inwardly digest this Word. Do not take it for granted. Hear it a lot, and then hear it some more. Desire it above all things, sweeter than honey and more precious than pure gold.

Do not so much listen because it is a command of God, which it is. Instead, train yourself to believe that in this Word you meet Christ. He speaks and is spoken about in this Word. He pours out all the blessings He has earned for you in this Word. As you love your Lord, love His Word.

In His Name, the risen Lord. Amen.