

# First Sunday after Trinity

Genesis 15:1-6; 1 John 4:16-21; St. Luke 16:19-31

June 14 A+D 2020

*Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

Are we in a good position? That's the question you ask when you're looking at the future, and calculating risk. How much cash do we have on hand? How many months can we meet our obligations without any income? Pandemics and riots make us nervous, to say the least. Our position seems fragile.

Rich Man in today's Gospel reading seems in a good position. Lazarus appears to be in a very bad position. It's better to be at the table than in the gutter. But later it's revealed that the way we evaluate our position is in a very different economy than God's economy.

The same is true for Abram and Sarai in the Old Testament reading. God had promised a son. But the years turned into decades, and there was no son.

**"Fear not,"** the LORD says to Abram. Here the fear isn't terror. Abram is—what emotion can we use? Sad? Disappointed? Wondering what his life all means?

Abram blames God. **"You have given me no children."** When sorrow runs deep, it's easy to blame God – or wonder why He hates you.

Abram's longing for a child is more than the natural desire for children. To Abram God had promised a son through whom all the nations of the earth would be blessed. The son of promise is the story of the entire Bible. Our first mother received a promise that a son of hers would crush the head of the serpent. The serpent brought death; the son would restore life to the world. From generation to generation the promise was passed down.

And here is Abram, old, and his wife, barren. Do you ever feel hopeless? When your only companion is the darkness? Ps. 88 ends with that feeling

of abandonment, even by God Himself: **“You have taken my companions and loved ones from me; the darkness is my closest friend”** (v18; NIV).

But to Abram God reiterates His promise, the promise of a Son. And Abram believed the LORD, and God counted it to him as righteousness. This is the foundation of the Bible’s teaching on justification by faith. Our conscience reminds us of our sins, all the ways we are hypocrites. But here we see that it’s not what we do that makes us righteous, for we can never do enough. But what you lack, God gives freely. That’s why He waits until Abram is too old, and Sarah is too old for babies – so they’ll know that God’s blessing is pure gift, and they contributed nothing. That faith—that trust in God—justifies, makes Abraham righteous. That faith alone—that trust in God alone—also makes you righteous. Faith alone; but faith is never, ever alone.

We heard St. John say in today’s Epistle that no one can say they have faith—i.e., that they love God—and yet hate his brother. Dr. Luther, in the last year of his life, said,

**Not all are Christians who boast of faith. Christ has shed His blood. We are justified by faith alone without works. <You say,> “I believe this.” The devil, you say! You have learned the words you have heard the same way mockingbirds learn to repeat things. Where are the fruits [showing] that you truly believe? You remain in sins; you are a usurer and more. Surely Christ did not die and shed His blood for the <sins> that you <are intent on> committing continually, but so that He might destroy the works of the devil.** [LW 58]

We pray not only that God would forgive sin, but that He would kill it. When sin is alive in us; when we burn with desire, that’s the work of the devil. Did Jesus die so that you can say, “I’m forgiven, it matters not how I live”? God forbid! Faith alone saves, but faith longs to live in love.

That’s what the post-communion collect asks for. As we have received the salutary, saving gift of Christ’s body and blood, we ask that it would strengthen us in both faith and love.

Rich Man's problem is not in his riches. It was in his lack of love. Lazarus, whose name he knew, was left to rot in the gutter. His only companions were wild dogs.

It's easy to feel, when the chips are down, like we're Lazarus. But we're much more similar to the Rich Man. We calculate what we have, and want it to increase. To live in twenty-first century America is to fare sumptuously every day. We are, collectively, Rich Man, or at least his brothers. **"They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them."** You have Moses and the Prophets—the Hebrew Scriptures—and you have the writings of the Apostles too! Do you hear them? Or are you as James said – a hearer of the Word but not a doer? Do you really **"fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself'"** (James 2:8)?

We are the Rich Man's brothers. We want the Law to apply to corrupt police officers, or rebel rioters – but it applies to you, in the corruption and rebellion of your own life. For what you do in the shadows God sees. And judges. **"Whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all"** (James 2:10).

The terrible doctrine of Hell—affirmed by the Lord JESUS today—is not ours to discard because it seems insensitive. The point of the parable is to get us to look at our lives, and repent.

And in this repentance, we sit in the stench with Lazarus. With barren Sarai and aged Abram, we confess there is no life in us. But we look to the promised Son. For what was really promised to Abram and Sarai was not Isaac, but Jesus.

In His death, He made His tomb with a rich man. He bore the Rich Man's sins too. He has borne your sins, and carried your sorrows.

You are not in a good position; your works have made you destitute. Renounce your riches, renounce your pride. Confess your lack of love, acknowledge you have lied. Not by works, but by faith you are justified.

Repent, and keep on repenting. The Father's promise is true. The Son is risen from the dead. The Holy Spirit will defend you when life is ending. Glory to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit for showing us pathetic rich men the true riches of love and grace.

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