

# Trinity 1

June, 6, 2021

Luke 16:19-31

Today we begin the Trinity season in earnest, meaning the long season of Green has come around once again.

The season of Trinity is growing season for the Christian as much as it is for a gardener tending fruits and vegetables. As the season progresses, the Christian faith should be deepened through the teachings of Jesus Christ.

Now, while the Gospel today appears to have a focus on the exterior surface of mankind, the foundation laid before us indeed dives below the surface of the soil and leads the hearer to his or her roots, to the heart of man.

The rich man has done well for himself by all accounts. To wear beautiful purple garments would be a luxury for a man in the time of Jesus. To feast sumptuously daily, now that's something because feasts were typically reserved for weddings or the arrival of an honored guest. But this guy can enjoy these luxuries without thought or care. There is no concern for budgeting and planning. Instead, the perks of life have become part of his daily routine; they have become part of who he is. So much that he never gives credence to poor Lazarus at his very own gate – his very own door. In many ways, Lazarus is one of the rich man's closest neighbors that fade silently into the fabric of society.

Now, Lazarus appears very different from the owner of the gate, where he has made himself a home. Lazarus is to this man what a person at a stoplight is to many of us, the Eeyore of a person who quietly fills the cubicle just down from you (or resides in the top square of your Zoom calls), we sinfully do whatever we can not to make eye contact with these neighbors at the doors and gates of our daily pathways that transport us from home to work and the like.

But the exterior of Lazarus does not match the heart of Lazarus. The surface shows a man whose body is not clothed in beautiful garments of purple, but rather one dressed by the agonies and trials of life. We could speculate what happened to Lazarus before this moment in time, but what we must genuinely focus on is the heart of Lazarus. The sores that cover and consume his flesh have not defined him. Instead, the trust he possesses in His Heavenly Father directs us to where mercy proceeds from in this life and into the next.

And here is where the Gospel leads us – to the life that is to come. To the life unseen while we walk this earth. Our lives matter now. Where we place our trust in this moment matters now.

It's easy for us to reflect on our lives and say, "I'm truly not like this rich man, I do give to the poor, I support programs to heal the ill and downtrodden, I donate to causes for the Gospel." But, Washington, D.C. doesn't just run on money; it runs on power and position.

Sometimes the thing we wear and hold dearest to our hearts resides in our titles – President of...., Director of....., Chairman of...., Teacher at..... Or graduate of [insert your alma mater here]. In this town, titles and degrees drive conversations, define the person, determine what dinner party invitations you may receive, and what kind of life awaits.

If one is not careful, all of these titles form and control you. The title you bear is what you become and how peers and the like identify you.

But, there is a tension here – you are like the rich man in that you have gone on auto-pilot - no longer noticing the world around you or those in greatest need – the family and friends at your door. The co-worker struggling with addiction. Your brother or sister in Christ experiencing emotional tribulation. The child in need of help with homework. The spouse simply needs you to listen to their trials.

While the shell of a man or woman that you are appears excellent and healthy, your heart is more like the flesh of Lazarus. You are poor and downcast because you have become consumed with yourself and how you are known and seen within this life.

Even in death, the rich man sees Lazarus as subordinate to him as he says to Abraham, *"Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame."* The request to *"send Lazarus"* is imperative; it's a command. What the rich man misses is that in death, the power and riches once possessed are no more for man. What is given as confessed in the creed will be eternal damnation or eternal life.

Soon, Cora will be asked in the rite of Confirmation, *"Do you intend to continue steadfast in this confession and Church and to suffer all, even death, rather than fall away from it?"* Her answer will be, *"I do by the grace of God."*

What an incredible response to this question. A reply that confesses that one cannot believe on their own without the help of God, without the forgiveness won by Christ, without the Holy Spirit that enlivens faith and keeps us in the one true Church. The response reveals a heart that trusts in God as Lazarus does even in the appearance of agony and pain as he lay at his neighbor's gate.

Life comes at us fast, and we cannot be sure that challenges won't come. They will come.

Last week we had the honor of receiving a presentation from our friend Dr. Edward Naumann on his work in Sri Lanka. He told us in Scripture Study how people who have heard the Gospel and converted to Christianity in Sri Lanka live in fear and danger by not only local populations but the family members closest to them. Once people believe in the Gospel, their lives are in physical and emotional danger as they are harassed, tracked down, and sometimes assaulted. In many ways, this faithful remnant over there is living the well-known hymn "A Mighty Fortress" – *"And take they our life, goods, fame, child, and wife, though these all be gone, our victory has been won; the Kingdom ours remaineth."*

The challenges of life are real, none of us are exempt, and the sores that consume our hearts constantly need healing.

In fact, life is so unpredictable; one minute, you are a leader, and the next, you are the thief upon the cross confessing your sin before Jesus. But, even as one confesses their sin, there is joy in your heart and heaven, because when you confess what ails your heart and brings you death in this life - you are faithfully placing your trust in the One whose death upon the cross and rising from the dead now raises you from the death of this life and gives you eternal life.

Our first Gospel of the Trinity season begins with the end in mind. It starts by reminding us that true faith is not located in the world around us, so don't become complacent in trusting this world, your possessions, or even your titles.

Cora, the life of the Christian is not promised peace or freedom from ailments. The trials, tribulations, and obstacles of faith will remain both near and far to you as they do for everyone sitting here today. The devil will speak lies into your ears and attempt to tell you that you have graduated from your studies and growth in the Christian faith – don't listen to him.

But, do trust in Christ Jesus and set your eyes and heart upon Him here in the Church – in the sacred Word and in His flesh and blood that now feeds you a foretaste of everlasting life.

It is best to view this day of Confirmation as one day of a very long growing season. As the season of Trinity, your growth will continue as you will say, *“by the grace of God.”* Every time you turn to God's Word or run to the sacrament, the Holy Spirit is pointing you to Christ Jesus and working faith and trust within your heart. There is no greater joy than this. In this way, no matter what life brings, God is bringing you through this life and into eternal life where you and all the faithful will be gathered to feast sumptuously unto the ages of ages. +INJ+

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