

# FIRST SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

“Ordinary Time, Extraordinary Grace”

Our Redeemer Dallas 2020

*Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.*

With the festival half of the church year behind us, we’ve now entered into what the church has traditionally called Ordinary Time. Not the most exciting moniker, I grant you, but certainly apt. I don’t think I could put it any better than twentieth century English novelist and poet John Meade Falkner in the opening stanza of his poem “After Trinity” (1910):

We have done with dogma and divinity,  
Easter and Whitsun past,  
The long, long Sundays after Trinity  
Are with us at last;  
The passionless Sundays after Trinity,  
Neither feast-day nor fast.

Long and passionless, yes, but not pointless. The time after Trinity is a time of *growth* for the people of God, hence the liturgical color of **green**. One may also trace in the appointed readings for this season a “progression from the declaration of the kingdom of grace, to the description of the kingdom, to the life demanded of its citizens, to the fulfillment and rewards of the kingdom.”<sup>1</sup> We begin, then, with a Gospel text that has to do with

## **The Invitation to the Kingdom of Grace.**

Luke 16:19-31 is a parable told by Jesus to the Pharisees. It is the last of a string of parables that began in chapter 14 with *next* week’s Gospel lesson, the parable of the great banquet. In today’s parable, Jesus describes two men: a certain rich man and a poor man named Lazarus. These two men couldn’t be any more different. The rich man, Jesus says, was clothed in purple and fine linen and feasted sumptuously every day; the poor man was covered with sores and longed to be fed with what fell from the rich man’s table. The rich man lived in a house with gates; the poor man lived outside on the street. Both men died, but poor Lazarus was carried by the angels to Abraham’s side, where he was comforted, while the rich man was buried and went down into Hades, where he was in torment.

But the most important difference between the two comes at the end, when Abraham says to the rich man, who’s just asked him to send Lazarus to warn his five

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<sup>1</sup> Phillip H. Pfatteicher, *Journey into the Heart of God: Living the Liturgical Year*, 306.

brothers, lest they also come into this place of torment, “They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.” “No, father Abraham,” replies the rich man, “but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.” But Abraham says, “If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.” And so, the biggest difference between the rich man and Lazarus is that Lazarus accepted the invitation to the kingdom of grace, while the rich man did not. He *refused* to accept, choosing rather to cling to the god he loved: his riches. This is no doubt why Lazarus is named and the rich man is not. Jesus says, “The one who conquers will be clothed thus in white garments, and I will never blot his name out of the book of life” (Rev. 3:5). On the other hand, “if anyone’s name was *not* found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire” (Rev. 20:15). So, it’s not that the rich man was rich or even that he mistreated poor Lazarus that he ended up in Hades. It’s that he in his life refused to hear Moses and the Prophets, to repent of his sin and trust in the promise.

Just like the Pharisees were now doing, Jesus had come on the scene with a very simple message: “Repent and believe in the Gospel” (Mark 1:15). But they wouldn’t. They *refused* to believe that Jesus was anything but a charlatan, an imposter. Jesus said, “I am the way to the Father” (John 14:6), but the Pharisees said, “We have *Abraham* as our father. We don’t need you” (Matt. 3:9). But that wasn’t true. As St. Paul writes, “not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring” (Rom. 9:7); rather, “it is those of *faith* who are sons of Abraham” (Gal. 3:7), the same kind of faith Abraham himself showed when he believed God’s word to make of him a great nation in whom all the families of the earth would be blessed, and it was counted to him as righteousness (Gen. 12:2-3; 15:6). “Not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but ‘Through Isaac shall your offspring be named’” (Rom. 9:7); through *faith* in the promise, the promise of *Christ*, God’s Anointed. And here He was, with an open invitation to repent and take refuge in Him; to “Strive to enter through the narrow door,” as He says earlier in Luke, lest “you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God but *you yourselves cast out*” (13:24, 28). Sound familiar?

So why didn’t they? Why not accept the invitation? Because, like the rich man in the parable, the Pharisees already *had* a god they loved: their riches. Just before our parable, we’re told that the Pharisees were “lovers of money” (16:14). This is after the infamous parable of the dishonest manager, which concludes, “No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money” (16:13). But the Pharisees, when they heard it, *ridiculed* Jesus. Again, they thought they were good with God, because of their lineage. But their hearts were far from Him.

And it showed in the way they treated others: despising the lowly, tying up burdens, hard to bear, and laying them on people’s shoulders, doing all their deeds merely to be seen by others, loving the place of honor at feasts and the best seats in the

synagogues (Matt. 23:4-7) -- you know, away from all the Lazarus types. The Pharisees would have been the first to tell you, "I love God." But as we read in today's Epistle, "If anyone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen" (1 John 4:20). You cannot serve both God and money. The Pharisees were lovers of money. Like the rich man in the parable, they took refuge in it, all the while ignoring their brothers in need, brothers whom Jesus said would go into the kingdom of God before them (Matt. 21:31), not because they were poor, but because they truly loved God, having heard Moses and the Prophets.

So, what are we to make of this parable? We're not Pharisees, at least not in name. What do Jesus' words to them have to teach us?

First, they teach us that

### **The Invitation Still Stands.**

Jesus still invites sinners to repent and believe in the gospel. Before His ascension, Jesus opened the apostles' minds to understand the Scriptures, and He instructed them to *continue* preaching repentance and the forgiveness of sins to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem (Luke 24:47). "Repent and believe in the gospel" was to be the Church's message at all times and in all places. To this day, we are all called to turn away from our sin and take refuge in Jesus; to let go of our idols and cling to Christ alone.

This is easier said than done, for we have many idols. We are lovers of many things, not just money, although that is a big one. It is, of course, not a sin to be rich or to have possessions, but as Paul points out in 1 Timothy 6, "the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils" (verse 10). Luther agrees, writing in his Large Catechism, "Many a person thinks that he has God and everything in abundance when he has money and possessions. He trusts in them and boasts about them with such firmness and assurance as to care for no one. Such a person has a god by the name of 'Mammon,' on which he sets all his heart. This is the most common idol on earth."<sup>2</sup> The rich man fell for it. The Pharisees fell for it. We fall for it.

And our neighbor pays for it. When we selfishly stock up for ourselves, wearing fine clothing, feasting sumptuously every day, all the while ignoring those in need around us, we show what master we serve. Jesus has indeed taught us to pray for daily bread, which God certainly gives to everyone without our prayers, even to all evil people, but He does not give it only for our *own* needs. Again, Paul writes in 1 Timothy, "If anyone does not provide for his relatives...he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever" (5:8). The author of Hebrews writes, "Do not neglect to do good and to share what you

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<sup>2</sup> Part I. The Commandments 5-7.

have” (13:16). And the Apostle John writes, “If anyone has the world’s goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God’s love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth” (1 John 3:17-18). Is God not the giver of all good things? Has He not provided abundantly for us, sparing not even His own Son but giving Him up for us all (Rom. 8:32)? Has He not promised to be our God and to generously provide us with all that we need for our daily life and our eternal salvation?

Then let this parable be a warning for us, a call to repentance, as it was for the Pharisees. Let us not refuse the invitation, choosing rather to cling to some other god we love, at the expense of our brother. There is only one God who loves us, only one who can provide us with all we need for time and eternity, and His name is the Lord, our Creator and the only true God.

The second thing Jesus’ words teach us is that

### **The Invitation Alone is Sufficient.**

Poor Lazarus had nothing; and yet, he’s the one who was carried by the angels to Abraham’s side, while the rich man, who had everything, found himself on the wrong side of the chasm. Why? Because even the finest linen, the most sumptuous feast, the biggest house, and the most impressive résumé can’t buy what Christ in His Word freely gives. It’s not about that. It’s not even about what you’ve *seen*. Remember what Abraham said, that not even seeing someone rise from the dead is enough to convince one of the truth. It’s about hearing Moses and the Prophets, which, as Jesus points out in a couple of places, are all about *Him*, who died *and rose from the dead*. It’s about gladly hearing and learning God’s Word, which is the power of God for salvation to all who believe (Rom. 1:16). Lazarus believed it. He believed the Lord, and, just like Abraham, his faith was counted to him as righteousness.

The rich man desired something more. The Pharisees, too. They demanded a *sign*, some definitive proof that Jesus was who He said He was. But even after His resurrection from the dead they refused to believe it. That’s why Jesus says to doubting Thomas, “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed” (John 20:29). The invitation alone is sufficient. Nothing need be added to it, not works done by us in righteousness nor a sign from heaven. It is, after all, an invitation to the kingdom of *grace*. That means “gift,” as in *free*, even and *especially* for poor sinners like us, who have nothing to give. In Christ, we have all that we need, and *then* some. We are clothed with the robe of Christ’s righteousness that covers all our sin. We are fed with the feast of His true body and blood from the Lord’s Table. Our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious one (Phil. 3:20-21).

And so, we are comforted. Even now, in any and all afflictions, we are comforted, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction (2 Cor. 1:3-5) -- with our words, yes, but also with our resources, remembering that God has made me and all creatures, body, soul, and all. This may be Ordinary Time, but let us not forget the extraordinary grace that God has shown to us in His Son. “We love because He first loved us” (1 John 4:19). We love because God, *our* God, is love, and rich or poor, we are His.

*In + Jesus' name. Amen.*

*Soli Deo gloria*

### **Questions for Reflection**

1. What is the main difference between the rich man and Lazarus in Jesus' parable?
2. How did this parable originally apply to the Pharisees?
3. What are some of your idols?
4. Why is the invitation (“Repent and believe in the gospel”) alone sufficient?