

**The First Sunday after Trinity
7 June 2026
Luke 16:19-31**

Poverty and Wealth in the Kingdom of God

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ—Amen

The text for this morning's sermon is the Holy Gospel appointed for today from the Holy Gospel According to St. Luke, the sixteenth chapter.

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit—Amen

Today our Lord tells a story with the goal that we would repent of our sin. But the thing about repentance is this: it is really hard to repent of sin when that sin goes unrecognized.

And sin is often hard to recognize because what God's Word calls "vice," the Old Adam and the world like to call "virtue." God's Word says if we confess our sins, God is faithful and just and will cleanse us from all unrighteousness. But the Old Adam replies: "Why would I need absolution? I haven't done anything wrong."

The Old Adam is a master of turning vice into virtue, and the world is his accomplice. Don't believe it? Just try to say something critical to someone else and watch what happens. The response is totally predictable: "How dare you? Who are you to judge? Don't judge me! You have no right to be so judgmental!" See how that works? So, the world has trained us to sit back and watch our neighbor rush headlong into hell and not even lift a finger to warn him about the danger of his sin—and this all in the name of "compassion" or "love."

But the true reason we're big on not judging others has nothing to do with compassion or love or even our piety. It is, in fact, just the opposite. The truth is: we don't want them turning the tables and putting us under the microscope. And we know that that is exactly what will happen if we say anything about our neighbor's sin.

“Who are you to judge? You’re no saint.” And we know that to be true. And so, we pass off indifference to sin in the name of “tolerance” and “love,” which is really just code for “you don’t judge me, and I won’t judge you.” Live and let live.

Now, to be sure, we aren’t the judge. When people say: “Who are you to judge?” The answer truly is “nobody.” Obviously, we are not THE judge. That should be as obvious as the fact that we’re not salmon. We are no more judge than we are the creator of all things. We do not sit in judgment of anybody.

But that doesn’t mean we ought to sit back and pretend that there is no judge at all. Indifference to sin is the opposite of love. Sin is dangerous, and when you love someone, you warn that someone about danger. As difficult as it is to stage an intervention for the addict we love, we intervene precisely because we love him.

Notice how—and addiction is a good example here—to love someone doesn’t always mean saying what he wants to hear. The addict wants to keep feeding his addiction, but he needs to hear the truth—precisely what he doesn’t want to hear.

But so often, we do a masterful job of turning vice into virtue. Today’s text specifically takes aim at the vices of greed and arrogance, self-righteousness and unbelief—sins, of course, which could never apply to any of us. We don’t see ourselves in the rich man. After all, which of us has nothing better to do than sit back and feast sumptuously all day, wearing the most luxurious of fine linens?

What we used to call greed, today, we call talent and industry: “He’s so industrious. Look at that guy. Now, that’s some good stewardship, right there.” Or: “I’m not greedy; I just know how to take care of myself.” You see how we do this? We dress up vice, and we call it virtue.

The same is true when we fly off the handle at someone. It's never that we're loose cannons; we're simply "passionate" and "zealous." Our anger is always what we would call "righteous anger." It is just and right because we've been wronged.

And so, we have little use for those medieval, antiquated notions of "sin" and "righteousness." Surely, we've gotten past all that. There are no more sinners around these days, but instead, the world is filled with holy people.

Perhaps the greatest danger to faith is the inability to recognize guilt. It's always someone else's fault. We justify ourselves, place the blame elsewhere, and avoid taking responsibility for our sin.

This is the surest path to hell. Where sin goes unacknowledged, it goes unforgiven. Repent. It doesn't matter why you did it or what your neighbor did to you. You have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. Repent.

We may be able to put on a show and keep others from seeing the darkness within. We may even be able to fool ourselves into thinking we're pious. But God is no fool.

It is the sin of self-righteousness to disbelieve what God's Word teaches about our sin. Satan wants you to think you're a good person. He has nothing but compliments and nice things to say about you. But to believe his pleasant lies is the beginning of atheism. Good people don't need a Savior.

Sure, we love to talk about Christ as our Savior—but only in general, abstract terms. From what is He saving us? The sin of others? The sins of the devil? Good Friday isn't about celebrating our goodness. Good Friday is a window into the darkness of our souls.

Luther once wrote:

“Everybody scratches, scrapes, manipulates... so that everyone... becomes a wheeler-dealer. In short, everything is leprous with greed, and yet, no one wants to be thought of as greedy.

And as it goes with greed, so it goes... with other sins: anger, jealousy, hatred, pride, and the like. What can we do about it? If we preach against it, people laugh and scoff; they do not want to acknowledge their sins or admit they have done wrong.

Worse, they want to travel the road to hell the way the rich man did here; and with the rich man they will indeed go to hell. For them, further appeal is useless. The fact is that when they are rebuked, they color and adorn their sins and vices with righteousness and virtue. How can they be helped? Since that is the way they want it, there's no way out for them but the abyss of hell with the rich man.”

Now, the trouble with the rich man wasn't that he had stuff. It wasn't even that he had a lot of stuff. It is not sinful to have nice clothes or even to eat good food. God created all of these things for our blessing, and to renounce the world, in the manner of the ascetics, is to neglect God's blessings. It is to call evil what God calls good.

But that is not generally our problem today. For every ascetic you find, there are at least 63,572 hedonists (ok, that statistic is made up, but you get the point). Our problem is greed and covetousness, and it is a danger to the rich and the poor alike. Wanting what you don't have is an equal-opportunity affliction.

The bad news—if we can call it that—is that only the poor go to heaven. Jesus says so Himself. It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven.

But the good news—if we can call it that—is that we're all poor, whether we realize it or not.

This is how our Lord put it in His revelation to St. John:

“For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your

nakedness may not be seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see. Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent” (Revelation 3:17-19).

The inability of the rich to enter heaven and the necessity of poverty was also the subject of our Lord’s most famous sermon, which He began with the words, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

Obviously, He was not talking about material wealth or material poverty. Possessions neither save nor condemn. But they will condemn us if we make them our gods and treat them as if they were the most important thing in the world.

And the fact that we are inclined to do just that is proof of our spiritual poverty. We are all poor, pitiable, blind, and naked, but only those who recognize this are, as our Lord put it, “poor in spirit.” Everything else is arrogance and delusion. The rich man’s sin was not his wealth. It was his faith—his trust—in his wealth. It was his faith that his wealth meant he must be right with God and have no need for a savior.

Christ calls you to recognize your sin, to recognize the fact that no matter your bottom line, you are spiritually impoverished. Christ calls you to repent and to recognize the treasure you have in Him. We are all beggars. Cling to the riches of God found only in Christ Jesus. And like Lazarus, you will receive an eternal wealth greater than anything this world can offer.

As St. John put it in our Epistle lesson: “So we have come to know and believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in Him.”

Because Christ died and rose again, His Word is powerful to convert sinners like you and me. The Word gives life through the Spirit, who always accompanies the Word to enter men’s hearts. The Word is also joined with water so that we are washed with a washing which forever

keeps away the flames of Hades. And through this Word, He also feeds us the richest, most sumptuous feast ever in His Body and Blood upon this altar. Although we are beggars unworthy of a single crumb, He gives the Meal-above-all-meals here.

Through the Word, the Father in heaven pours out His gifts on us generously, although we deserve nothing. He has even prepared an eternal feast of joy for you, so that for all that you suffer on this earth for the sake of Christ, you will be comforted far more in the life to come.

You cannot justify yourself and your sin. No matter how rich you are, you have nothing to contribute. And the truth is: you have no need to justify yourself—to deny your sin. Own it. Repent of it. And like Lazarus, trust God's promise that for Christ's sake, you are forgiven for all your sin.

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit—Amen

The peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus—
Amen

Sermon based in part on one by the Rev Eric Andersen