

## 6.7.2026 Trinity 1 (Luke 16:19-31)

In the time of the Old Testament, Moses acted as a mediator between the Almighty, infinite and perfectly holy God of heaven and earth, and the stubborn, rebellious people of Israel. From the time that God called him to lead His people out of slavery in Egypt, Moses was the man who bridged the gap between God and the people. For example, when the Israelites reached Mount Sinai and witnessed the power and presence of God there in thunder, lightning, and the mountain enveloped in smoke, the people begged Moses to intercede for them, saying, “*Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But do not let God speak to us or we will die*” (Exodus 20:19). Throughout their journey in the wilderness, Moses carefully spoke to Israel, relaying exactly what God instructed, and as they prepared to enter the Promised Land, God, through Moses, said to His people, “*I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live, loving the Lord your God, obeying His voice and holding fast to Him, for He is your life and length of days...*” (Deuteronomy 30:19-20).

*I have set before you life and death...* These words were addressed to the Israelites, both as a nation, and to each individual, and this choice that was given to Israel, life or death, is a choice given to every one of us. In this life there are only two paths that lie before us, two paths that God, through Moses, set before the Israelites, and two paths that God, in the Person of Jesus Christ spoke of in the Sermon on the Mount, when He commanded those who would follow Him to “*Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it*” (Matthew 7:13-14).

There are only two paths that lie before us, every one of us must choose which path to take, and our Gospel lesson this morning illustrates the truth that while we might expect these paths to be miles apart from one another due to the fact that they will one day end in two entirely different destinations, it's actually true in this life that the path to heaven and the path to hell are often as close as our neighbor. In the passage we read from the Gospel today, Jesus told the story of “*a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day: and there was a*

*certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores, and desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores” (Luke 16:19-21).*

*I have set before you life and death... Life and death, blessing and curse, heaven and hell were set before the rich man and Lazarus. They each chose a path, and we're told that when Lazarus died, he was carried by the angels to a place Jesus described as Abraham's bosom, which to His audience would've been a beautiful image of Paradise. To say that Lazarus was resting in Abraham's bosom was not only to say that he was admitted to heaven, but that he was the favored guest at the heavenly banquet. Lazarus, even in hunger, affliction, and suffering, chose the narrow, difficult path to life. His rest was in the bosom of Abraham because he didn't allow the trials, sorrows, and difficulties of this life drive him away from God, but rather, it was the cross of hunger, affliction, and suffering that drew him nearer to God. Through it all the song in his heart echoed the words of our sermon hymn, “So by my woes to be, nearer, my God, to thee, nearer, my God, to thee, nearer to thee.”*

Lazarus died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom, and in the text we learn that *“the rich man also died, and was buried; and in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom” (Luke 16:22-23).* The great, impassable gulf between life and death, the chasm that divides heaven from hell now separated these men, but it wasn't always that way. In fact, before the day of their death, these men were neighbors. Lazarus laid at the rich man's gate, full of sores, and the rich man chose the broad path in order to step around him, and so we see that in this life the path to heaven and the path to hell are not so far apart, they're often as close as our neighbor, and it's not only the text of our Gospel which reveals that truth.

In the Epistle we read this morning, a letter written for our instruction, St. John wrote, *“Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love... 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 4:7-8, 20).* The

truth revealed in these verses is clear: If we don't love our neighbor, our brothers and sisters who we see, know, and who were made in the image of God, then how can we say that we love the invisible God whose image they bear?

The wounded Lazarus lying at the rich man's gate was a visible representation of the invisible God, and when the rich man chose the broad path in order to step around him, he not only revealed that he had no love for the starving beggar at his gate, he revealed that he had no love for God. The love we have for the God we cannot see is known by the love we have for the neighbor we can see, and this truth is manifest again by our Lord in His vivid description of the Final Judgement. In St. Matthew's Gospel account Jesus spoke of the day, as we profess in the Creed, when He shall come again, with glory, to judge both the quick and the dead.

On that day people of all nations shall be gathered before Him, and *"He shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats: And He shall set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say unto them on His right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me."*

*"Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not. Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee? Then shall He answer*

*them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me. And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal” (Matthew 25:32-46).*

God, through Moses, said, *“I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life... God, in the Person of Jesus Christ, commanded those who would follow Him to “Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction... narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life....”* Two paths, but only one Way to the Father, the Way set before us all through the Gospel - *loving the Lord your God, obeying His voice and holding fast to Him* through the grace and mercy given to us by the precious death and glorious Resurrection of His only-begotten Son. The Way to life set before us by the Father, through the Son, and walked only in the power and presence of His Holy Spirit.

In this world where life and death are set before us, God not only commands His people to choose life and love, He gives us grace and the opportunity to do so. Notice, the rich man in the parable didn't have to go looking for a wounded beggar to love, Lazarus was lying at his gate: Heaven and hell are as close as our neighbor. May God give us grace to walk the straight and narrow, the difficult path to life, to the end that we may encounter our hungry and thirsty neighbors, our naked and sick brothers and sisters who bear our Father's image, and may our love for them be a sure sign of our love for Him.