Sermon | Proper 21C

TEXT: Luke 16:19-31

25 Sept. 2016

A Blessed Life

*In the Name of +Jesus. Amen.*

Dear saints,

Whether we know it or not, we all have in our minds a picture of what a blessed life is supposed to look like. So what if I were to ask you, what kind of things make up a blessed life—**what does a blessed life look like**—what would you say? Perhaps,

 To have health. Strength in your muscles, so you can go to work, earn a living. Maybe,

To have wealth. A nice house, a comfy bed, two cars in the garage. Maybe a little extra money to so you can do things like, go to a football game, or a nice vacation.

To have friends. People who like you, admire you, want to hang out with you, think you’re a pretty cool guy, or gal.

To have fun. Taking time to enjoy life’s simple pleasures. Or throw a party! Now who doesn’t like a party?

To be loved. To be cared for. To be admired. Respected. To live a relatively comfortable existence.

Now, who would doubt it? What I just described is a blessed life! That’s a life you could take one of those ‘Life Is Good’ stickers and slap it on there, and everyone would agree—that’s what it means to have a blessed life! Everyone wants that kind of life!

So if that’s a blessed life, what about a not-so-blessed life? What would a not-so-blessed life look like?

 To be weak. To have a chronic illness, pain in your body that won’t go away.

 To be poor. No place to lay your head at night, except somebody else’s curb.

To be hungry. Walk by the nice restaurants, smell the aromas wafting out of the kitchens, but your stomach will be growling later because you can’t afford dinner.

To be lonely. Ignored. Forgotten. Kicked to the curb like a piece of trash. Despised. Mocked. Ridiculed. Hated.

Now, who would doubt it? That’s a not so blessed life. And I don’t think that’s the kind of life anybody will be signing up for anytime soon.

Trouble is, Jesus tells a parable in this morning’s Gospel, the story of the Rich Man and Lazarus. And in this story, Jesus takes our ideas as to what the blessed life really is, and turns them upside down.

First we meet this Rich Man. Lived the perfect picture of a blessed life, right? Clothed in fine linens. You know, Armani suits, nice ties. Probably had mansion, a Ferrari or two in the garage. Says he feasted sumptuously every day. That means a plain old Tuesday in the workweek was a Thanksgiving spread. This guy had it all. He lived the good life. He was loved, honored, respected by all the people. Everyone wanted to be around him. Everyone wanted to be him, to have his life. His life was the envy of the world. But then he died. And it turns out, his life was not-so-blessed, because he found himself in torment.

And then there was Lazarus. Perfect picture of not-so-blessed, right? Poor. Homeless. Laying by the Rich Man’s gate. Covered in sores. To add insult to injury, the dogs would come and lick his sores. Disgusting. Says every once in a while, he looked up, and he longed to be fed with the crumbs that fell from the Rich Man’s table, but nobody gave him anything. How pitiful. How sad. But Lazarus died, and the angels were there to take his soul to Abraham’s side, where all the saints are comforted, and Lazarus has heaven.

So this Great Reversal happens:

 This Rich Man, who lived a rich life, finds himself a beggar in hell.

 But Lazarus, the poor man, beggar on earth, finds himself rich with heaven.

So that in the end, it was Lazarus—can you believe it? Lazarus, poor Lazarus—you never would’ve guessed it, you never would’ve expected it—but it was Lazarus who had the truly blessed life. Lazarus was really the Rich Man.

And so we’re left with this question: **what is it that makes a life truly blessed?**

It’s helpful to understand what our Lord is doing with this parable is, he is setting up a contrast between two types of riches.

On the one hand, the riches of the Rich Man: abundance of earthly riches. And the temptation is always for us to believe that if we just have earthly riches—a nice home, fancy food, lots of friends, good health, honor, power, glory—we have a blessed life. We think: if we have these things, life is good, we have everything we could ever need. And if we don’t have these things life is bad, everything is lost.

But Lazarus had none of those things—none of the kind of riches the Rich Man hand. But there was another kind of riches Lazarus possessed, that the Rich Man didn’t, and that was heavenly riches.

Lazarus had God’s Word. He had Moses and the Prophets, the Old Testament. And in the Old Testament, he had the promise of a Savior, a Savior whom God was sending into the world to set us free from sin and death. Lazarus had the Lord’s Word. And that’s just way of saying, Lazarus had Jesus. And he believed in Jesus, he trusted in Jesus. He knew that, no matter how bad his lot in life became, he had a God who was his ever present help in time of trouble. And his God would save him, deliver him from sin and death, translate his soul from this veil of tears to heavenly bliss that knows no end. Lazarus had faith in Jesus. He had Jesus for his God. Lazarus had heavenly riches, a wealth that endures to eternal life.

Now the Rich Man had a god too. And it was money. And money is a pretty deceptive god, because if you have money, you can live a pretty decent life on earth. I don’t know if I agree with the cliché “money can’t buy you happiness.” It sure seems to be able to buy a whole lot of earthly happiness, for this life. Just ask the Rich Man. Look at how he lived. Look at how he was ‘blessed.’ But there was one thing his money couldn’t do. His money couldn’t save his soul. His money couldn’t deliver him when it really mattered. And that’s true of all our idols. All idols—every other God we’re tempted to fear, love, and trust besides the one true God—will always fail us and let us down at the end. And that is because no other god has the power to save and deliver from sin and death, besides the God who paid for sin and destroyed death by his own death and resurrection, the Lord Jesus Christ.

So back to the original question: what is it that makes life truly blessed?Today the Lord would have us know and believe the **truly blessed life does not consist in having earthly riches, but in having the heavenly treasure of the Lord’s Word and gifts.** And you dear saints, you have the Lord’s Word and gifts. Like Lazarus, you have Moses and the Prophets and even the Apostles, which is to say, you have the Holy Gospel, which teaches you of Jesus, and all he won for you by his death and resurrection. You have the promise of the Absolution, the forgiveness of sins. Like Nora this morning, you have the promise of your Baptism, that you are a child of God, a member of his family. You have the Lord’s body and blood. All of which is to say, you have Jesus. You have Jesus as your God.

And at the end of your life, when every other treasure is gone, and you’re left like Lazarus, left with nothing to hang onto except Christ and his promises—that will be enough. And when, by God’s grace, you fall asleep in the faith of Lazarus, the Lord will send his angels to take you to Abraham’s side, where, with Lazarus and all the saints, you will be comforted and blessed forever. *SDG.*