

**THE OCTAVE OF THE FEAST OF THE MOST HOLY TRINITY**

Text: St. Luke 16:19-31

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE ✠ SON, AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

What does it mean to hear Moses and the Prophets? To hear Moses and the Prophets is nothing less than to hear the Voice of God. Our God speaks to His children through His Word, read, taught, studied, and preached, and through His Word, He creates faith where there was none before. This is truly a great blessing, for where there is faith there is the forgiveness of sins, and where there is the forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation (Luther). The Word of God is, indeed, the Medicine that revives souls and saves poor sinners through God-given faith, for we are saved by grace through faith alone.

This truth never occurred to the rich man whom our LORD refers to in our Gospel text for today. It seems he had a better idea. His better idea was to reject Moses and the Prophets. For him, they were less than superfluous for salvation. *“No, Father Abraham, send someone from the dead. Send Lazarus. Yeah, that will do the trick. That will change the hearts of men. Then my brothers will believe.”* Like an ancient Charles Dickens, the rich man refuses to believe that the Word of God can create faith and save his brothers. He puts his faith in spirits, just not the HOLY SPIRIT. But Father Abraham rejects the rich man’s idea out of hand: *“If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead.”*

So, it is, that those with hearts of stone will, persist in their hardness after death, even unto eternity. In life, they wanted salvation on their terms; they preferred to create a salvation of their own design and a god in their own image. In death, it will be no different.

Therefore, in this life, those trapped in the sin of unbelief will seek after signs and wonders. Ecstatic emotions and empty excitement are what tickles their fancy and satisfy their itching ears. Their desire is pleasure and stimulation. They want an experience. What they really want is a country club atmosphere and so they reject the true, historic, Holy catholic and Apostolic Church. In rejecting the Apostolic Church, they also reject the Apostolic faith. They believe that human emotions excited by vacuous cotton candy theology are the true sign that God loves them; that God truly does exist. But JESUS answers them, *“...neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead.”*

We live in an evil and adulterous generation, one that *“seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.”* They want a sign, but they cannot see that God has already given the only sign they will receive. Seeing, they cannot see, and hearing, they will not hear, and so they cannot and will not believe even though the CHRIST, the greater Jonah, after three days in the belly of the earth has risen from the dead. Therefore, it is as JESUS

said, *“They have their reward.”* Take heed and pay close attention to our LORD’s words, lest you also have your reward.

The rich man rejected God’s Word of salvation. Even as he suffered the agonies of hell, the rich man did not believe in the power of Moses and the prophets, that is, he did not believe that it is the Word of God alone that has the power to change the hearts of men. What is more, he even receives instruction from Father Abraham himself, and still, he rejected the clear truth and demanded salvation in his own way; the rich man demanded God on his own terms.

Repent! Repent because so too, rich man, do you.

Yes, we too, want God on our own terms. We want God to conform to our way of thinking. If what God has to say does not agree with what we feel is meet, right, and salutary then we tend to redefine God by reinterpreting His Word, bending and reshaping it to please us.

We would be much more comfortable with a god made in our image rather than allowing God’s Word to have its way with us, reshaping, and remaking *us* in *His* image. Perhaps we would be much happier if the pastor God sent to us would be a little less zealous for God’s Word and a little more compromising about the truth of God’s teachings. Perhaps we would be a little more impressed with the man God sent us if he would just see things our way. It would please us far more if we could make over the man God has sent us in our image instead of him showing us our image in the mirror of God’s Law. Every one of us would feel far more comfortable with God and His servants if they would just listen to our advice and see things our way!

But be careful! God has given you Moses and the prophets, and even more, He has given you the sweet message of His Holy Gospel; hear them! Hear them, because to listen to anything else, to demand anything else, is nothing but arrogance and unbelief!

The rich man rejected the Word of God and in doing so he rejected God Himself. Poor Lazarus, however, heard the Word of God *“And he believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.”* Lazarus lay at the rich man’s gate rejected by the world, yet clinging to the Word of God. He did not demand that God change the message or his situation. He did not attempt to shape God into a god of tolerance and compromise. Lazarus did not trust in himself and his own fickle emotions and he leaned not on his own understanding. His one desire was to eat of the crumbs from his Master’s Table.

Just as did the rich man, Lazarus received all he desired. He heard God’s Word and believed it, and believing it he was given everlasting life. Just like Lazarus, all those who hear God’s Word and keep it are blessed. For it is written, *“...blessed are those who hear the Word of God and keep it!”*

But remember, you *“keep”* the Word of God, not in the sense of obeying a command, but in the sense of keeping His Words in your heart, pondering them, confessing them, and believing them, and as far as God gives you the strength, putting His words into practice.

Remember also that outside of the Word of God, no miracle can rescue a sinner, not even if one should come back from the dead—no, not even JESUS. So it is that all who refuse to hear God’s Word hear nothing. Whoever will not hear God’s Word is already dead and the dead cannot hear anything. But our LORD JESUS tells us that those who hear and believe will never die, having received the gift of eternal life.

So, when you hear God’s Word, what does the Word of God tell you? What is it our LORD would have you believe and confess? That though you suffer the loathsome, festering sores of sin, JESUS does not step over you as you lay helpless at His gate. Unlike the world that crosses to the other side of the road to avoid you, Christ does not turn His face away. JESUS set aside the riches of heaven and took on the form of a slave to save you. He has given you the name “*Lazarus*”, which means, “*the one whom God helps.*” He took on your infirmities; He carried your sorrows and He was wounded for your transgressions, He was bruised for your iniquities, and the world turned its face away from Him. Jesus became like Lazarus for you to save you, and by His wounds, you are healed.

JESUS stepped outside the gates of heaven to save you. He died for you and gave you a place at the heavenly feast that never ends. He took you into His arms and anointed your head with oil. JESUS has bathed you in the pure waters of Holy Baptism where it not only soothes your open, sin-filled sores; it cures them and washes the filth of sin away. He dressed you in the robes of His righteousness and feeds you with the Medicine of Immortality to cure all that ails you with His very own Body and Blood.

O the depths of the goodness and grace of the God who is Love, and His SON, JESUS, who is Love incarnate; who has befriended you, who has saved you, who has died for you and risen for you, who has opened your eyes to see what is true and has given you faith.

He knows you by name; to you, He gives the riches of His Kingdom; to you, He gives the right to be called a child of God. One day you too shall recline with Lazarus and all the saints in the bosom of our FATHER because you have heard His Word and believed.

Yes, even this very morning you have heard Moses and the prophets declare salvation in JESUS CHRIST alone. Indeed, you heard more than Moses and the prophets! You heard the Gospel of JESUS CHRIST and believed Him when He said, “*I forgive you all your sins.*”

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE ✠ SON, AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

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