

Sermon – July 8<sup>th</sup>, 2018. Our Saviors Lutheran Church

## How Do You Spell Schenectady?

Grace and Peace to you and from our Lord Jesus Christ. Today we are confronted with another parable of Jesus. Jesus loved to teach his disciples and us in the parable form. This parable has a heaven and hell theme. The hell theme has to do with lawyers and politicians. Here is a story about heaven.

St Peter is at the entrance of the pearly gates. A certain man is all set to enter and St Peter stops him at the entrance. "Welcome to heaven," St Peter says. He then says, "Before you enter, there is an entrance exam". The guy is surprised. After all, he is an ELCA Lutheran. A good member of Our Savior's in Neenah. He had been taught that he would be saved by grace. But he figures, how hard can it be. So he says, "Fine, what's the test?" St. Peter explains that it is a spelling test and that he has to spell only one word. The word most important for heaven. Okay, says the guy, "What's the word?" "Love" says, St Peter. Of course the man says L O V E and St. Peter welcomes him to heaven.

Weeks later, Peter finds the man and mentions that he is going on vacation and could the man guard the gates of heaven for a few days. The man agrees and St Peter reminds him of the spelling test. The guy says "I got it." As it so happened, the very first person to arrive at the gates was his ex-wife. "I'm surprised to see you here," she says. He responds with clenched teeth, "likewise". He goes on to explain that there is a test to enter and she has to spell a word before she gets in. "Fine" she says. "What's the word?" The guy says, "Schenectady!"

Of course, we are ELCA Lutherans. There is no test. We are saved by grace. We all know that.

So what's it all about, Alfie. What can we learn from this parable this morning. It's about 3 people. A rich man, Lazarus and Father Abraham. It's actually set in 3 scenes.

Scene 1. We meet Lazarus. The name in Hebrew means- God is my help. We all have seen people like Lazarus. Out of sight, out of mind. Guy who sleeps in alleys and doorways. Sequestered in a homeless shelter on the other side of town. A

beggar, homeless, covered with sores. We know Lazarus or people like Lazarus even if we don't acknowledge that they exist.

We meet the rich guy. He is not named. A guy out of the lifestyles of the rich and famous. Clothed in fine linen. Clothing costing more than most people's daily wage. The rich man in the parable is the epitome of a narcissistic, self indulgent individual. So self indulgent that he almost stumbles over Lazarus as he begs at his mansion door.

And of course Lazarus dies- no surprise there. Easy to imagine him dying. The unnamed rich man also dies- also no surprise there. Nobody lives forever, even the rich and powerful, no matter how hard they try.

Scene 2. This scene is a picture of the afterlife. Lazarus is in heaven and the rich guy is in hell. Kind of funny. Even as the rich guy sits in torment, he still tries to order Lazarus to do something for him. The contrasts are as stark as the message. A reversal of fates.

- Poor man named, the rich man is not. Didn't deserve a name.
- Rich man has a proper burial but Lazarus is carried by angels.
- Lazarus looks down from heaven, the rich man looks up begging for relief.

Again, what's it all about Alfie? What's our message? Who are we in the parable? Are we the rich man? Probably, not. Maybe we are well fed, maybe richer than 90% of the world's population, but probably not as described in the parable. Can we identify as Lazarus? Again, probably not. We might have had some financial setbacks but probably not begging on the streets.

Do we identify as Father Abraham? Of course not. Only certain politicians who I will not name identify as a deity.

No. We are the masses listening to the story. The ones who get up each day, caring for our loved ones, going to work, making dinner, and living a somewhat hectic life. We are the ones coming to Our Savior's to get our battery recharged so that we can be better Christians, Monday through Saturday. We are the ones gathered around Jesus as he tells this parable.

\*\*\* You are no doubt familiar with the Emergency Alert System. Developed by FEMA so that whoever is President could alert us to an impending disaster within 10 minutes or sooner. You are watching your favorite show on TV and all of a

sudden there is a loud obnoxious noise followed by the words- this has been a test of the emergency alert system- if this had been an actual emergency... blah, blah, blah.

Well. That's the parable. It's an emergency alert system from Jesus. Yes, for us it is a warning system to change our ways, to look around, to share, to act differently. It's as if Jesus is looking at us and saying, "You know the problem, you see the hungry ones, you see the troubled ones." Don't just sit there and do nothing.

Favorite hymn of mine is Jesu Jesu

Verses

Neighbors are wealthy and poor  
Varied in color and race  
Neighbors are nearby and far away

These are the ones we will serve  
These are the ones we will love  
All these are neighbors to us and you.

And the refrain- Jesu Jesu, fill us with your love, show us how to serve, the neighbors we have from you.

Let's pray we get the point of the parable even if we can't spell Schenectady!  
Amen- Let it be so.