

19“*There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. 20And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, 21who longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man’s table; even the dogs would come and lick his sores. 22The poor man died and was carried away by the angels to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried. 23In Hades, where he was being tormented, he looked up and saw Abraham far away with Lazarus by his side. 24He called out, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am in agony in these flames.’ 25But Abraham said, ‘Child, remember that during your lifetime you received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in agony. 26Besides all this, between you and us a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who might want to pass from here to you cannot do so, and no one can cross from there to us.’ 27He said, ‘Then, father, I beg you to send him to my father’s house— 28for I have five brothers—that he may warn them, so that they will not also come into this place of torment.’ 29Abraham replied, ‘They have Moses and the prophets; they should listen to them.’ 30He said, ‘No, father Abraham; but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’ 31He said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.’”*

I sit down to write this sermon. The phone rings. It is a woman who asks to speak to Bill Lindemann. I tell her that she has the wrong church – that he is at the Presbyterian church. She says that her eyes must have skipped down a line – that she really wants to talk to the pastor of this church. I tell her that I am the pastor. She asks for help paying her electric bill. I tell her that I cannot help her unless she is approved by LOVE in The Name of Christ. She tells me that she has been dialing their number for two weeks and they are not answering. I tell her that I will call them and have them call her. I dial 322 Love and it is busy. A few minutes later busy again. I call the administrative number and the call is answered on the first ring. The person I talk to says they have two lines and the lines are ringing constantly. “Could you call this woman?” I ask. “No, we cannot do that” is the response. We talk some more – she takes the number of the woman who called me. I tell her we have money to help this woman if she is approved.

I return to writing my sermon. The phone rings. The woman seeking help asks if I got hold of LOVE, Inc. I tell her that I did and they said they would call. She tells me they have not. She tells me how desperate she is to find help. I tell her I cannot help without approval from LOVE. She tells me how it is not her fault that she is needing help and that LOVE needs to get another line if there are too many calls coming in to keep up. Her voice rises, she

talks about how believers are to help the poor. I repeat that I cannot help without approval from love. She speaks a word of blessing upon me and says goodbye.

So what should I preach today? Jesus told the story of a great reversal. In this life the rich man feasted every day. The poor man lay on the ground covered with sores. Dogs were licking him. He was hungry. The poor man dies and angels carry him to feast with Abraham. The rich man dies and is in torment in Hades. When he calls to Abraham for help this is what Abraham responds: “Child, remember that during your lifetime you received your good things, and Lazarus (the name means God has helped) in like manner evil things. How he is comforted here and you are in agony.”

What should I preach today? That in the life to come that woman who begged from me will be with Moses and Abraham and Elijah in Paradise and I will be in torment because I had my good things now and she suffered so then she will have good things and I will suffer?

Or should I say, In Jesus we are all forgiven so we do not need to pay attention to this parable if we believe in Christ? I believe that we are saved by grace – not by our works.

As I type this the phone rings again. The woman is calling to apologize for her words and attitude on the previous call. I thank her for her call. I tell her I will keep working to connect her with LOVE, Inc. She thanks me. We say goodbye.

We are saved by grace, by the love and forgiveness that Christ gives. That is the only hope for salvation you and I have. But we also live in a world where people ask more of us than we are ready or able to give. Some are poor. Some are scam artists. Twenty years ago when I attended meetings to establish LOVE in the Name of Christ - LOVE INC. in Lorain County it was so that they could sort out for me who were the poor ones who needed help and who were the users. Every time in recent years that I have gone ahead and helped someone without approval from LOVE,INC. I have found out that I have been used. Once it was the one who needed money for gas – I did not give

money but accompanied him to the gas station to fill the car myself. Once there I found that after half a gallon the tank over-flowed. He had hoped for cash from me.

Or there was the day that a man called who was just out of prison – Love, Inc. was closed for the day. He was hungry, I met him at Wendy's in Elyria, paid for his meal. The next time I was with the administrator from LOVE I asked if she knew of him. She told me he was a user – telling all sorts of stories that were not true.

Many people need help. I am grateful for LOVE, INC.

As I type this sentence the phone rings. Tammy from Love Inc. is on the line. She explains that ever since I have called her has been calling the number I gave her. The phone has been busy. Finally she got through and she began to gather the information needed to recommend that we help this woman. The woman wanted to tell Tammy all about her problems. But when Tammy asked for information about her income and assets the woman became belligerent. After more attempts by Tammy to find out if the need was real the woman hung up in anger.

I would like it if the world was different and you and I could help people in need person to person. But I am not wise enough to do that.

When you support the benevolences of Christ Lutheran you support LOVE, INC. Money you put into the Green Envelope supports ministries that bless the Lazaruses of this world. Be generous – your gifts pay the salaries of people like Tammy at LOVE Inc. who every day deal with complicated situations and complicated people and seek to show the love of Christ in their work.

Be generous. Christ is so very generous with you and with me, not giving us what we deserve but what we need, the gift of salvation. Amen.

