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¹ This sermon was originally written on the Gospel for Holy Communion on the First Sunday after Trinity, 2012.

² *The Table of Lessons*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxix (Anglican Church of Canada 1962).

³ Exodus 35:30—36:7 (KJV).

⁴ St. Luke 16:19-end (KJV).

⁵ St. Luke 16:22-23 (RSV).

⁶ The Domestic and Foreign Mission Society of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the U.S.A.

⁷ *Works*, Vol. 2, 331 (Philadelphia, 1943).

⁸ “Article XII. Of Good Works”, *Articles of Religion*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER 605 (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

⁹ St. Matthew 22:37 (KJV), St. Mark 12:30 (KJV), and St. Luke 10:27 (KJV).

¹⁰ Deuteronomy 6:5 (KJV).

¹¹ *The Lord's Supper, or Holy Communion*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER 69 (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

¹² St. Luke 10:30-37.

¹³ I John 4:10-11 (RSV).

¹⁴ St. Matthew 22:37-40 (RSV).

¹⁵ St. Matthew 25:41b-43, 45 (RSV).

¹⁶ I John 4:20b-21 (RSV).

¹⁷ I John 4:8 (RSV).

¹⁸ This belief is a vital point in the fairy tale of Rumpelstiltskin.

¹⁹ Cf. St. Luke 13:25, 27.

²⁰ St. Luke 16:26 (RSV).

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SERMON FOR EVENING PRAYER

The Fourth Sunday after Easter¹

(Year I)

Lessons:²

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the thirtieth Verse of the thirty-fifth Chapter of the Second Book of Moses, called Exodus.³

“And Moses said unto the children of Israel, See, the LORD hath called by name Bezaleel [**BEZZ-uh-leel**] the son of Uri [**YOU-ree**], the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah; And he hath filled him with the spirit of God, in wisdom, in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship; And to devise curious works, to work in gold, and in silver, and in brass, And in the cutting of stones, to set them, and in carving of wood, to make any manner of cunning work. And he hath put in his heart that he may teach, both he, and Aholiab [**uh-HOE-lih-ab**], the son of Ahisamach [**uh-HIZZ-uh-mack**], of the tribe of Dan. Them hath he filled with wisdom of heart, to work all manner of work, of the engraver, and of the cunning workman, and of the embroiderer, in blue, and in purple, in scarlet, and in fine linen, and of the weaver, even of them that do any work, and of those that devise cunning work.

“Then wrought Bezaleel [**BEZZ-uh-leel**] and Aholiab [**uh-HOE-lih-ab**], and every wise hearted man, in whom the LORD put wisdom and understanding to know how to work all manner of work for the service of the sanctuary, according to all that the LORD had commanded. And Moses called Bezaleel [**BEZZ-uh-leel**] and Aholiab [**uh-HOE-lih-ab**], and every wise hearted man, in whose heart the LORD had put wisdom, even every one whose heart stirred him up to come unto the work to do it: And they received of Moses all the offering, which the children of Israel had brought for the work of the service of the sanctuary, to make it withal. And they brought yet unto him free offerings every morning. And all the wise men, that wrought all the work of the sanctuary, came every man from his work which they made;

“And they spake unto Moses, saying, The people bring much more than enough for the service of the work, which the LORD commanded to make. And Moses gave commandment, and they caused it to be proclaimed throughout the camp, saying, Let neither man nor woman make any more work for the offering of the sanctuary. So the people were restrained from bringing. For the stuff they had was sufficient for all the work to make it, and too much.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the nineteenth Verse of the sixteenth Chapter of the Gospel According to St. Luke.⁴

“There was 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. And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham’s bosom: 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. And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame. But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented. And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence. Then he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father’s house: For I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment. Abraham saith [SETH] unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one

loved God but, as St. John puts it, “he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him, that he who loves God should love his brother also.”¹⁶ Also, “He who does not love does not know God; for God is love.”¹⁷

And if the rich man did not know God, then God did not know him either. You will notice in that in the Gospel account, the poor man is named; he was Lazarus. But not once is the rich man named. A name is not just evidence of one’s identity but, in ancient times, was believed to have a real connection with the essence of one’s being. So when two persons were introduced by name, one to the other, when each was “made known to” the other, then each was in effect entrusted with a little piece of the other’s being.¹⁸

Also, when a Jewish child was named on the eighth day after birth, either by circumcision or by being presented in the Temple, that child was, in effect, being introduced to God so that he or she would thereafter be known to God. The same is true in our Christian baptisms. So one subtext in this parable is the suggestion that God did not know the rich man¹⁹ and, therefore, could not be expected to invite someone He did not know to share His dwelling.

Conclusion:

In other words, the rich man’s treatment of Lazarus—or rather, his failure to treat Lazarus as Lazarus needed to be treated—is our evidence that he did not love God. And where he did not love God, how could he have been expected to spend eternity in God’s presence?

So if the rich man had loved his poor neighbor as much as he loved himself, then he would not have found himself calling out to heaven from the wrong side of that “great chasm [that] has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from [the one side to the other] may not be able....”²⁰

tan, which is likewise reported by St. Luke,¹² is at bottom the same: the priest and the Levite, preoccupied with their ritual duties at the Temple in Jerusalem, did see the wounded man but responded only by avoiding him so they would not become ritually unclean and so be unable to perform their liturgical functions. Only the despised Samaritan, an hereditary enemy of the Jews—and viewed by them as an heretic—bothered to stop and see to the needs of one from whom he could expect neither gratitude nor thanks.

As St. John wrote in the same Epistle from which we have already quoted, “In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.”¹³ The only adequate response to that love is the one Jesus set before us and that St. Matthew recorded in these words: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets.”¹⁴

St. Luke’s account of the rich man and the beggar is not the only testimony in the Gospels to the importance of our not just throwing alms to the needy who happen to cross our paths but to actively seeking out and aiding those who require our help. As St. Matthew records Our Lord as saying:

“Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.... Truly, I say unto you, as you did it not unto one of the least of these, you did it not unto me.”¹⁵

The rich man in today’s Gospel forgot this lesson. Had anyone asked him, he undoubtedly would have affirmed that he

went unto them from the dead, they will repent. And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: “The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham’s bosom. The rich man also died and was buried; and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes, and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus in his bosom.”⁵ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Introduction:

We live in an age when, for most people of good will, including for most of the Christians around us, the old controversy between salvation by faith and salvation by works has been resolved, and resolved decisively, in favor of salvation by works. We are told that the Christian Church is primarily a great, historic, and widely-respected social service agency and that its primary function is, and therefore its essential focus must be, on promoting peace, abolishing hunger, curing disease, and, above all, upon frustrating the traditional independent foreign policy of the United States in favor of some vague, Pan-European policies of appeasement of terrorists and thugs and denial of threats to national security and integrity.

These tendencies are so well-entrenched that even as far back as the 1970s, one large mainline Protestant church in the U.S.,⁶ in its perhaps misplaced zeal for social change, was spending its worshippers’ donations to buy armaments for Communist terrorists in Mozambique. These same tendencies to value action, even ill-considered action, above devotion are so persistent that just a few years ago, that same denomination urged its members to jettison the traditional Good Friday obser-

vance of the Stations of the Cross and to replace them with meditations upon the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals.

Those are are essentially an elaborate “guilt trip” that demands increased subsidies to supposedly “developing” countries. There, if past experience is anything by which to judge, the extra cash will be diverted to numbered bank accounts in Basel, Geneva, the Cayman Islands, and Curaçao, whence it can be drawn to subsidize the jet-setting, Eurotrash lifestyles of the recipient countries’ elites.

Theme:

Certainly, there is a relationship between faith and good works, but the “Social Gospel” approach—that is, viewing Christianity as primarily a relief or charitable agency—runs the risk of our focusing so strongly on the needs of this world that we lose sight of those of the next one. In our human concerns, even in our legitimate human concerns, for our fellow creatures, we must never forget God the Creator, the God Who so loves us that He sent His Son to die for us and Whose love is our true motivation for doing good to others.

Development:

As Martin Luther wrote, “Good works do not make a good man, but a good man does good works.”⁷ He is echoed in our twelfth Article of Religion: “Albeit that Good Works, which are the fruits of Faith, and follow after Justification, cannot put away our sins,... they are pleasing and acceptable to God in Christ, and spring out necessarily of a true and lively Faith; insomuch that by them a lively Faith may be as evidently known as a tree discerned by the fruit.”⁸

This explanation rests, ultimately, on one of Our Lord’s statements in the three Synoptic Gospels,⁹ which itself is based upon a commandment in Deuteronomy: “[T]hou shalt love the

LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.”¹⁰ Jesus’s words in those three Gospel accounts are conflated in our service of Holy Communion, where we call them “the Summary of the Law”. The Prayer Book version goes like this:

“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it; Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.”¹¹

This rule, that our love of God will show forth in our love of our neighbors, and therefore that our love for God may be measured by how we show our love to those neighbors, is the explanation for today’s Second Lesson. Saint John’s First Epistle General warns us that “love is of God”, which implies that if we are not truly people of love, we do not truly love God and therefore cannot expect to spend eternity dwelling with the One whom we do not love.

The passage from St. Luke’s Gospel which forms today’s Second Lesson illustrates this principle clearly. The rich man in the parable not only did not love his poor neighbor, he was so oblivious to the unfortunate that daily as he left his house, he passed the beggar outside his gate without ever even noting his existence. The rich man’s preoccupation with his important affairs and his evident self-love could only have been so extreme because he gave no thought to God or to what God would have had him do.

So, as the parable shows, being a person who would not be comfortable living in the presence of God, then after his death he was permitted to live outside that presence, that is, in hell.

This parable was not the only one in which Our Lord made this same point. The famous story of the Good Samari-