

Sermon: 2nd Sunday after Trinity

Text: Luke 16:19-31 (v. 29)

Theme: The poor and the rich in God's eyes.

Goal: God gives us the Scriptures, which reveal Christ, to save all

Dear Friends,

Introduction: *There are millions of Lazaruses in this world today, for whom life is difficult, painful and hazardous. They are deprived of knowledge and communication and robbed of dignity, confidence and self-respect. Poverty means more than a lack of what is necessary for material well-being. It can also mean the denial of the opportunities and choices most basic to human development, that is, the opportunity to lead a long, healthy and creative life and to enjoy a decent standard of living, freedom, dignity, self-esteem and respect of others* (ABC 1236).

On the other hand, there are millions of rich people, like the one of our story, who don't care of the poor and don't show concerns and love for the needy; but only enjoy in a selfish way the fruit of their labor without sharing it with others. A popular proverb says, *there are none so blind as those who will not see.*

This biblical story is a call to warn us against selfishness, against ignoring the needy; and, at the same time, it is an encouragement to use and follow "Moses and the prophets" – this means, the Scriptures – as the only way to escape from hell and to reach heaven.

I – The reality in Mozambique

Most of the population in Mozambique is among the millions of Lazaruses, especially in the region where the Lutheran Church is doing her mission. Severe draughts sometimes followed by flooding season when the rains arrive don't allow the families to have a regular crop in their small farms, - the only source for most of the

people to get their daily bread for their big families. If some try to go to the cities, searching for a job and better standard of life, they are exploited by their employers and have to live in slums – in much worse conditions than they used to have in their simple straw huts in their villages.

Besides these poor physical conditions, there are very poor spiritual conditions. Due to the 11-year long Independence War between 1964 and 1975, followed by a Civil War, which lasted 15 years from 1977 to 1992, that still has its effect in the fight from the opposition against the government, the European were expelled from the country and thousands of refugees fled to neighboring countries and all over the world. During the wars, the people didn't have schools and study opportunities; most of the churches were closed and there were no priests to teach and to comfort the people. The traditional African religions revived and grew again, with witchcraft and witchdoctors, spirits and ancestors' cults, lots of fears and no hope in the hearts of the people.

When the Lutheran Church began her work in Kapasseni in 2006, the doors opened up for the Gospel! People received the freedom of the Christian faith with eagerness, rejecting the devil and the evil spirits, and committing their life to Jesus, their Savior. Besides the Gospel, the many Lazaruses also received schools and small medical clinics from their rich brothers from Canada. The church grew fast, and the founder asked for help to prepare leaders and pastors. That was when the Brazilian Lutheran Church and I myself entered the story in 2007, offering Theological Education by Extension and by intensive courses, as Mozambique and Brazil are Portuguese speaking countries. The Lutheran Church in Mozambique has now more than 80 congregations, and “the Lord is adding to their number daily those who are being saved” (Acts 2:47). And only eight

ordained pastors and their around 60 leaders are in charge of this sister church! The new ordinary Christians are spreading the Good News, “for out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks”

(Matthew 12:34).

II – Our reality

What is our reality in South Africa? Of course we have lots of needy people in our country. The recent disaster in Knysna turned lots of “rich man” into “Lazaruses” from day to night. But it cannot be compared with the reality of Mozambique. Will we be like the rich man of the story Jesus told, ignoring the physical and spiritual needs of the people?

God has been gracious to us. We have what is necessary for our daily life; we have the opportunity to study, to work, to have a church and a pastor, to have “Moses and the prophets” to speak to us. Even if we are not that rich as the man of the biblical story, what counts is the attitude of our heart. Even if we don't have a Lazarus laying down at the gate of our house, there are many Lazaruses around the world, - and this time I am speaking specifically about those in Mozambique – who need our help. They need not only bread and food; they need “Moses and the prophets” so that they can escape from hell and go to the bosom of Abraham. And this is the first task of the church: To teach them the truth, to give them Bibles, to help them to build churches where they can worship the true God, to support them in their own missionary efforts, to support the Theological Training. There is no foreigner missionary working there. The founder had to go back to Canada due to health issues. It's all done by the eight pastors and by the local leaders, with the blessing of the Holy Spirit. 30 new candidates have been trained since 2015 and they are helping their pastors. Also, 30 new candidates, who don't speak Portuguese, but

only the local tribal language, are being prepared by the ordained pastors to lead services in their own communities. And those 60 candidates are not waiting till the end of the Theological Course to begin to teach and to work; they are already active leading Sunday School, doing home visits, and leading service in the absence of the pastor. Their practical task goes hand by hand with their studies.

Conclusion: The story of the Rich and Lazarus doesn't say that all the wealthy people go to hell and all the poor people go to heaven. No! But it raises the awareness of how we are managing what God gives us. Do we have an eye and a heart to the poor? to the physically poor and to the spiritually poor? to those who are close to us and to those who are far from us?

When the rich man in hell expressed his concerns about his five brothers still on earth, Abraham gave him the answer: "They have Moses and the prophets; let them listen to them." Moses reveals God's Law and condemnation to all, because all are sinners. And the Prophets reveal God's promises, which were accomplished in Jesus Christ when He died on the cross for our sins and rose again for our justification. He is the one whom God raised from the death as a sign of His good will to save everyone; and yet so many don't believe in Him.

We are still in the time of grace. Moses, the prophets and the apostles have been preached among us, in Mozambique and all around the world, proclaiming repentance and salvation by faith in Jesus. Let us thank God that our ears have opportunity to listen to His words of love and forgiveness, and let us help others to have the same opportunity to listen to the Gospel, to believe and to be saved. Amen.