

Trinity 1

“If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead.”

In this Gospel the Lord presents examples of faith and of unbelief in order that we also may see clearly the opposites, abhorring the one and clinging to the other.

In the rich man we see the nature of unbelief and in Lazarus the nature of belief.

And we see the judgment of God upon believers and unbelievers—a judgment which is both dreadful and comforting.

Dreadful to the faithless and comforting to the faithful.

Unbelief is the real sin. A rejection of the voice of God.

He sought and strove after these earthly pleasures.

It is not as though earthly pleasures are in themselves sinful.

It is the pursuit of them instead of God’s righteousness which is the sinful thing.

When we think of earthly treasures, we ought not to think only of money and property — although these are certainly included.

But earthly pleasures also include, family and friends, good standing in the community, happiness and the like.

For all of these it is true that, while they are not evil in themselves, you are evil when you seek after these things with your heart.

For when this happens, your loyalty is split between God and created things.

And when God, in his wisdom, chooses to deprive you of one or more of these things for a time, the sinful heart would rather leave the Word of God than to leave the pleasures of this life.

This is the reason why split loyalties are not only dangerous, but they are the first sign of unbelief.

So Christians have been taught to confess from the beginning, *“The LORD our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your might.”*

Moses and the prophets offer no middle ground—either you love the Lord in this way, or you hate Him.

But this hatred of God will always show itself eventually in the hatred of the brother and in a disregard him.

It will do no good to say, “But I do love God!—It’s just that I have no sign that God wants me to love this particular person.”

St. John writes, *“If someone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?”*

In other words, the only sign or appearance that you need is God’s Word.

And God’s Word is not overly complicated or inaccessible to the common man.

You can learn and memorize the entire catechism in a single day.

Nor is it too difficult to understand.

When He commands you to love your neighbor as yourself, you are to do exactly that without explaining away a single syllable.

When Jesus says, “I and the Father are One,” you can believe just as He says, that there is another, who is not Jesus and is called the Father and yet He and Jesus are One. There is the Holy Trinity in a nutshell.

When Jesus says, “This is My body.” You can believe just exactly as He says.

It doesn’t matter if I don’t believe my neighbor deserves to be loved.

It doesn’t matter if mathematics cannot allow one thing to be two.

It doesn’t matter if the host looks, feels and taste like only bread.

In every case, the Word of God is true, reliable and clear.

Those who will not submit themselves to God’s Word will not be persuaded by the greatest of signs.

For God’s Word which you hear is the greatest and most effective sign which God gives — even more so than His own resurrection from the dead!!

This is the beautiful comfort of the Gospel for today.

Namely, because of the certainty of God’s Word, all other signs are meaningless.

So even though Lazarus was covered with sores and licked by the dogs, this sign in no way could over-ride the promised bliss.

God’s forgiveness and salvation were on Him even if it appeared in this life that he was cursed.

In fact, through the Word which He heard and believed, his sorry lot itself became of sign of his participation in Christ.

So also with you. Even when you are at the lowest...

Even when your life shows no signs of God’s favor...

When happiness has departed from your heart and comfort from your bones...

When money and goods have slipped through your fingers...

And family and friends are leaving you cold...

Still, all these signs are nothing in the face of God’s word which you hear today and God’s food which you eat.

Today God’s Word and Sacrament declare that you are the most blessed of all.

Today, in spite of what it may seem or feel to you, God’s Word declares that you are God’s most precious possession.

Today, because of the forgiveness of sins which you receive from the hand of God, you have a promised dwelling place in Abraham’s bosom.

The seven-fold gifts of the Spirit are today given to you from the bleeding side of Jesus Christ: Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness and self-control.

And through Christ’s Word, you also are given the promise, *“Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things,; but now he is comforted and you are tormented.”*

The good things—emotional and physical comfort which will often escape you in this life are part and parcel of the gift of eternal life which lies in store for you through the suffering, death and resurrection of Christ.

Which is yours by faith through the hearing of the Word of God. AMEN.