

Pastor T.C. Arnold
1st Sunday after Trinity
Luke 16:19-31
June 3rd, 2018

After church last Sunday, Andrea and I traveled over to the St. Louis area to see my mother who lives in Alton, IL. As you head north and cross the Mississippi River on the Lewis and Clark Bridge from St. Charles County into Alton, the view is really quite pleasant. Alton is a historic town with many old buildings and streets composed of brick and cobblestone instead of pavement. The Lewis and Clark Bridge is impressive too. The bridge is sometimes referred to as the **Super Bridge** because its construction was featured in a NOVA documentary entitled *Super Bridge*, which highlighted the challenges of building the bridge, especially during the Great Flood of 1993. It cost \$85 million to construct and has a unique design with the pillars of the bridge in the center and the cables coming out over the bridge toward the sides. This bridge is an impressive 108 feet wide which replaced the former bridge that was only 20 feet wide. The “old Clark Bridge” was so narrow and dangerous that when I was a teenager, my mom and dad would not let me drive across it. It had a curve in it at one end and if you met a truck coming from the other direction, watch out! When I think of bridges, this bridge, for me, always comes to mind.

What comes to mind when you think of bridges? Do you think of the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco or the bridge over the Mackinac Straits in Michigan? Perhaps you think of the suspension bridge which swings majestically over the Royal Gorge in Colorado? Maybe when you think of a bridge you think of an old rusty bridge near where you grew up. Someone once said that bridges are like people – Spectacular and beautiful, or plain and simple.

Bridges are important because of the functional purpose they accomplish, but today we are also going to consider how and why bridges are built. In fact, we are going to learn under the guidance of the Holy Spirit that “*Love Builds Bridges, Not Walls.*”

The rich man in the text for today tells us a lot about bridges. He tells us about physical bridges (without realizing it) and then later on, quite explicitly, about spiritual bridges. However, there was a wall between the rich man and Lazarus. It was wealth. Jesus once said, “*It is much harder for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God than for a camel to go through the eye of a needle*” (Mark 10:25). Why is it so difficult for people with so much of the world’s goods to enter God’s kingdom? Not simply because they are rich, but because the possession of the goods of this world, or the desire to gain them, often replace the desire for the one thing needful... the love of Jesus... and also the great needs of others that are around them.

The rich man probably didn’t even fully understand the plight of the Lazarus. He probably didn’t even think of the poverty and the suffering of this man who was constantly at his gate. All he probably saw was a man that was in his way... a man that was making his sidewalk dirty... a man that kept begging for what was in his pocket. For the rich man, his earthly possessions were a bridge over “street vermin” like Lazarus. Wealth was a bridge over the cares and the problems of this world on which the rich man could walk daily. Lazarus was brought to the gate of the house with a wall to the rich man’s house. Here was a wall that was meant to keep others out.

Lazarus had no walls. The text says that he had friends who carried him to the door of the rich man. He had dogs too... not his dogs. They would come and lick his sores. The licking (I know it’s gross) may have been painful, but therapeutic. But here is something else Lazarus had. He had hope in the midst of his suffering. He relied on God and what St. Paul would express really well in Romans chapter five, “*More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, know that suffering produces*

endurance, and endurance produce character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our heart through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us." Lazarus had what he needed and that did not include walls.

It shouldn't be too hard to identify with both of these characters in the story mentioned in Luke chapter sixteen. Have not all of us committed ourselves in one way or another to the goals of the rich man? How hard it is to not be concerned about providing for our families in a time when it costs more and more to live. How often have we fallen into neglect of our concern for the wider community of people around us; the work of our congregation in its God-given tasks of mission and ministry in the name of our Lord Jesus; and sadly, even to neglect fellowship of meaningful prayer life and genuine loving interaction in our family life. We have all been guilty of putting the things of this world before the Lord. For that we need to repent. We have all been the rich man... no matter if we identify with this man's wealth or not. It's not a matter of what is in his pocket, this is about what is in his heart.

I would contend that we have been Lazarus too. Whether our health, the death of a loved one, our vocations, the sting of a bad of relationship, or mental and emotional struggles... these things have caused you to be a beggar... calling out to God for help... seeking after His divine relief... we know what suffering is. And though sufferings are unpleasant, though pain is miserable and extremely difficult to bear, do not underestimate its value.

In June of the year 1999, my brother preached from this pulpit at my Ordination/Installation Service... the day I became your assistant pastor. I don't know if any of you remember what he said to me from this pulpit but when he said it, I wanted to run up to this pulpit and punch my brother in the arm and make him take it back. He looked right at me and said, "I hope and pray that you fail!" But he said this out of love and knowing what failure produces. He said, "I hope and pray you fail, because you will learn more from your failures than your success." And he's right. Anyone with a little wisdom about how life works knows that is true.

And out of sufferings that is true too. Out of our sufferings we learn to lean on a Lord who knows suffering's greatest struggles. Out of sufferings we have no better place to turn than to our Lord who promises to be with you always even to the end of the age. Through sufferings we understand that we cannot do it alone... or with the things that we possess... or with any kind of selfish intent. Our sufferings draw us close to God... and beloved... in the midst of suffering today, draw closer to Him. I promise you will not regret it. He loves you and He will take care of you. You are the Lord's Lazarus... and though we may be poor in this world... financially... emotionally... Jesus makes us right by giving us His unending righteousness. Earthly contentment through the pleasures of the world builds walls. Heavenly contentment found in the gifts of Jesus for you and the work of Jesus through you to others builds bridges.

There was no bridge to God's kingdom for the rich man. He built his bridges over the needs of others and apart from the love of Jesus in this world. There is a bridge for Lazarus. He trusted in what is more. The more is what Christ earned for him. The more is what the faithful have and what we put our hope in as Christians today. Don't be the rich man. And understand that if you are Lazarus, in whichever way, you are loved by God who has you store up treasures in heaven where moth and rust cannot destroy. This treasure came down from heaven for you.

Amen

The peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.
Amen.