Text: Luke 16:19-31

**Introduction**

There is a standard proverb, “seeing is believing.” We usually trot that out when someone has promised us something. I promise I’ll help you with the lawn work. I promise I’ll do my homework. I promise I’ll pay you back after payday. It goes along with “talk is cheap.” And I’m not here to knock on them, because they have their domain.

The problem is that domain is not the spiritual life. In the spiritual life, “faith comes by hearing.” Talk is not cheap, but it is the Word proclaimed that takes pride of place. And moving from hearing to seeing, in the Spiritual life – and in much else – believing is seeing. We walk by faith and not by sight. The things that are seen are transient, the things that are unseen, eternal.

If there is one thing our current environment should make abundantly clear is that we only see the things we already believe.

**Text**

Our gospel text today balances around these two points. It ends with Father Abraham telling the rich man, “they have Moses and the prophets, let them hear them.” The rich man complains back, “No, Father Abraham, they will have to see to believe.” Actually he says to them “if someone goes to them from the dead they will repent.” But that is the point. Send something they can see. If they see something miraculous, they will believe.

Father Abraham responds that faith comes by hearing and believing is seeing. “If they don’t hear Moses and the Prophets – if they don’t hear the word of God. They won’t believe. And if they won’t believe, they will never see, even if someone should rise from the dead.” You wouldn’t believe how fast it never happened.

Which is of course what the past 2000 years since the first Easter have been about. Jesus literally rose from the dead. The Father literally gave us exactly what we would ask for. Send someone back form the dead to tell us. The problem is that if we do not believe, we have no problem denying the resurrection. Making up all kinds of excuses to ignore it.

Our text **starts** with the reality of how spiritually deaf and blind we can be. And the more materially rich we are, probably the deafer and blinder.

The rich man, traditionally called Dives, which is just rich man in Greek, is dressed in purple and fine linen. And the man never has to worry about what is on the table. Not even just the occasional mac’n’cheese or comfort food meal. Dives feasted sumptuously every day. Steak and Lobster, surf and turf with the finest wine. The purple is of course a marker of rule or political authority. The fine linen is the man dressed in cultural sophistication. And the feasting is everything good. Dives has it all. He is the good and the great. He does well by doing good.

And every day he walks right past Lazarus. Every day at his gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus. And Dives never sees him. Dives’ dogs see Lazarus. The man is so poor and pathetic that the dogs take pity on him and lick his sores. Lazarus just wants what the dogs probably get, the scraps that fall from Dives sumptuous table. He most likely asked daily as the great man dressed in his finery left his gate to see and be seen. But the cries of Lazarus never fell on Dives’ ears. The scraps of his sumptuous table never make their way to Lazarus. Dives never even sees the poor man.

The first time the Dives notices Lazarus is when he “lifts up his eyes in Hades.” He could never be bothered to lift up his eyes on earth and mitigate the suffering of Lazarus, but now in suffering himself, he sees Lazarus in the bosom of Father Abraham. And he calls out, probably like Lazarus used to call out. “Have mercy, let Lazarus notice me, just dip his finger in some cool water.”

Dives can’t see the good works that God has placed in his way to do. He can’t hear the Word “have mercy.” He never heard Moses and the prophets. Dives was spiritually blind and deaf, He was so surrounded by everything good this world has to offer. He could never even see the poor man at his gate.

These points of hearing and seeing, or not hearing and not seeing, surround the stakes. What we hear and what we see in this temporal world have eternal consequences. “Child, remember in your lifetime you got it all, and Lazarus nothing. Now, the first shall be last and the last first. Now he is comforted and you are in anguish.” The three steps that separated you and Lazarus on a daily basis has become a chasm that can’t be crossed. You would not cross those three steps in the temporal, in the eternal they can’t be. If you won’t do it with borrowed time, you wouldn’t with the eternal.

What you hear and see, and how your act now, has eternal consequences.

**Christological**

So, what hope do we, collectively the richest people this world has ever seen, have?

First we have Moses and the Prophets. Jesus says at the end of Luke’s gospel that “everything written about me in Moses and prophets must be fulfilled. And he opened their minds to understand the scriptures.” Through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and through the Apostolic teaching we are able to hear and understand the scriptures. And they all speak about Jesus and what he has done for us. Jesus told us to seek and we would find. And where we start to seek is Moses and the prophets.

But even more than Moses and the Prophets, someone risen from the dead has been sent to us. We have the apostolic witness to the resurrection. And their testimony as to what it means, which is that our sins are forgiven. We will have a place in the world to come.

We also have what Paul writes in the Epistle today. That lesson is primarily about the qualifications for pastors and teachers. But what the Augsburg Confessions says is: “That we may obtain this faith, the Ministry of Teaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments was instituted.”

That place in the bosom of Father Abraham Christ has secured for us. That place of comfort that we could never see on our own? Christ gives it to us by grace through His work. That cross, what we pick up and carry in this life, gives way to eternal glory. And Jesus has not left us or any of our brothers and sisters alone to stumble blindly toward torment. He has sent out his witnesses. And he continues to send them out to proclaim the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come.

**Moral**

So today we are called to faith by the Word. Christ has saved you. He invites us to this meal where he gives us himself and sustains us through our days of pilgrimage. In faith you see the body of Christ gathered around the body of Christ, created by His Word.

And in this faith we are called to see the good works that God has placed at our gates. Just as the body of Christ is there in that bread, those good works are laid out in advance for us to walk in them. Do we see them? Believing is seeing.

**Eschatological**

Of course my preaching is foolishness if Christ is not raised.

It is worse than foolishness, it is cruelty, if what we physically see is all there is. If that were the end truth, that this life is it. Then Dives would be right. Seek the purple. Enjoy the fine linen and meals. Do not give a second thought to the less fortunate.

The entire Christian story depends upon that proclamation of eternity. A dead man has come back. Christ is risen. He is Lord. And He has prepared a place for us.

Our secular world – represented well by Dives – has a way of simply saying that it is the truth, that it doesn’t require a faith. But in spiritual things believing is seeing. This world believes that there is not a life in the world to come. This world believes that what is on this table is simple bread and wine. Really what it believes is that what happens in the temporal world has no effect on the eternal. Either because there is no eternal world, or because it thinks the day of grace continues into eternity.

Either way, what our world believes about eternity does not square up with what Jesus tells us. Jesus tells us both that there is a world to come and that the day of grace is today. Tomorrow there is a giant fixed chasm. What you believe in this world makes fixed things in eternity.

How you live always starts with faith of some kind, faith in somebody’s word. What Word do you believe about the world to come?

And how has the Word you believe, changed what you see?