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St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Lazarus, our Role Model”

Text: Luke 16:19-31 (Amos 6:1-7; 1 Tim 3:1-13)

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

There is much talk of **role models** in our day and age. People that we can look up to, and aspire to be like. People of good character, good morals, and who are good examples. And there are many people appointed to serve as role models for us: athletes, political figures, educators, astronauts, policemen, writers, nurses, doctors, and many more . . . sometimes even good ol' Mom and Dad. And whether you are very young or very old or somewhere in between, it's good to have such people to imitate, and follow the example of their life. And who you pick is important, because role models come in all shapes and sizes – and some are good, and some are not so good.

Well today, in God's Word, we heard about a role model. Someone who is an example of a living and steadfast faith. A person that, as Christians, we would all do well to imitate and be like. **And that person is Lazarus.**

Now, I've *never* heard any parent say that they wish their child would grow up to be like Lazarus! And I'll admit – those words have never crossed my lips either! But consider today, that there really is no better role model for you and me and our children, than this poor ol' sore-covered, homeless and hungry, beggar. And if we can be like him, then like him, we are truly blessed.

For, you see, Lazarus knew what was important – and it's not the things of this world that we so often hungrily chase after. The things of this world that come and go so easily and so quickly. People who invested in Enron had great wealth one day, and nothing the next. Folks with big, beautiful houses are having their mortgages foreclosed on, and going from spacious one day to the shelter the next. And then there are the tragic stories of the Michael Vicks of the world, with a 130 million dollar contract one day, and facing jail time the next. Now, *it's not wrong to be rich* – but it sure

is dangerous. For the more you have, the more you have to cling to. The more that you have, the more tempted you are to do *anything* to keep it, and to believe that your life is defined and given and *measured* by the things of this world.

But Lazarus shows us a different way; a better way. The way of living faith. Faith that does not trust in the things of this world, and so does not despair when those things are taken from us. Faith that lives each day from the hand of God, trusting *each day* that He will provide our daily bread. Faith that knows you are never so rich as when you belong to the living God, and that you are never so poor as when you have everything in this world and life, and nothing in the next.

This kind of faith is more than mere knowledge. The rich man, like many people today, had the *knowledge*. He knew that God *exists*. He knew who Abraham was, even calling him father, as any good Jew would do. But what makes one a son of Abraham is not physical descent, but to have the faith of Abraham. (Gal 3:7-9) *To fear, love, and trust in God above all things.* [Small Catechism, explanation of the First Commandment.] To trust not just in His *existence* or His *performance*, but in His **promises**. For so we read of Abraham: that “*he believed the Lord and it was counted to him as righteousness.*” (Gen 15:6) Abraham believed, even though he never did receive what he was looking for on this earth. (Heb 11: 13-16, 39-40) Abraham believed even when told to offer up his son Isaac. (Gen 22:5) Abraham believed even when everything in his life was screaming at him that it was *foolish* to believe. But Abraham would not listen to the voices of doubt and despair that came from within and from without. He listened only to the Word of God, and clung to those promises.

Now, it's never *easy* to do that – for Abraham, for Lazarus, or for you and me. So don't expect it to be! Your sinful flesh will betray you, the world will mock you, and satan will be constantly attacking you to drive you to despair and to put your faith in something more tangible, more real, and therefore “more reliable.” That's what the rich man wanted too . . . for his brothers. Something more real than God's Word and promises alone – send them someone from the dead! That'll do it! But it doesn't. Deaths, tragedies, miracles, produce only temporary piety at best, or create new objects of idolatry at worst. And then we wind up worse than when we started.

No, let Lazarus be your role model. Of faith. Faith which knows that God measures differently than we do. That His approval or disapproval with us is not measured by the things of this world and life. That knows that if everything is taken away, we have less to cling to here; and that if we are given more, we have more to give! But that none

of that changes our status with God. For that is based on something much more sure and certain than anything in this world: the death and resurrection of our Saviour Jesus Christ. For *He* is the promised son of Abraham through whom all the nations would be blessed – blessed not with the riches of this world, but with something far more valuable: the forgiveness of sins. And with the forgiveness of our sins we are much more than faithful sons of Abraham – we are, in fact, sons of God. (Gal 3:26)

For not to Abraham did Lazarus cling, but to *the promise given to Abraham*, that God would send a Saviour. One who would free us from the bondage of this world and from our sin. One who would conquer death and establish an everlasting kingdom. One who would take us children of men and make us children of God. (Gal 4:4-7) The promise God kept by sending His Son to the manger and to the cross, and that He keeps still by sending Him to us through the water of the font, the Word of absolution, and the bread and wine of the altar. These things may look Lazarus-like: poor and lowly – but as the poor, beggarly appearance of Lazarus hid a son of God, so too here is hidden for us the Son of God. His forgiveness, life, and salvation given here, to make sinners into sons, and beggars into kings.

And this they do, because the King became a beggar, and the Son a sinner, on the cross. For Jesus was the rich man who did not rejoice in His riches, but came down from heaven, to be a beggar with us beggars. He came down and took on our human flesh, to redeem your sinful flesh. He was despised and rejected, even to death on the cross. That taking our place, we might have His place. That because He thirsted, we might never thirst, but drink deeply of His forgiveness. That because He hungered, we might never hunger, but be fed by His body and drink of His blood. That because He died, we might not die eternally, but instead die now in the waters of Holy Baptism, and there also rise with Him to a new life. A new life of faith. A new life not like the old life. A new life as a son of God, known, like Lazarus, by name.

The prophet Amos rebuked the people of Israel for their lack of faith and their love of the things of this world. St. Paul urged Timothy and all pastors not to love and cling to the things of this world, but model the life of faith in Christ alone. That we might all be like Lazarus. That we see in him a role model for all ages. And learn from him . . . that blessed *are* the poor in spirit, blessed *are* the pure in heart (Mt 5:1-12) . . . blessed are those who hear the Word of Moses and the prophets, and believe (Lk 11:28).

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.