4 August 2019 St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Pentecost 8 Vienna, VA

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"Relax, Eat, Drink, and Be Merry! Yes!"
Text: Luke 12:13-21; Ecclesiastes 1:2, 12-14; 2:18-26; Colossians 3:1-11

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

The rich man in the parable Jesus told today *was exactly right*. Maybe you're surprised to hear me say that. Because Jesus criticizes him. Jesus calls him a fool. Jesus holds him up as an example of what not to do. And that's right, too. But the rich man's desire to ***relax, eat, drink, and be merry*** is spot on. That's *exactly* what God wants for you. Now. As His baptized children, you can ***relax*** now in your Father's love and care for you. You can ***eat and drink*** here and now at His Table. And you can ***be merry*** now because you have an inheritance in heaven that your brother, Jesus, provided for you with His death and resurrection. An inheritance that doesn't end or go away when you die, but one that will never be taken from you.

So this rich man was a fool not because he wanted this, but because he could have been doing this all along, but didn't. He missed out because he misunderstood life. And the man who came up to Jesus that day was in danger of doing the same thing. He was playing the part of the fool in this parable. And maybe he's not the only one. But this man, he had an inheritance he wanted divided. That means someone died - most likely, his father. And maybe his father was a rich man. Maybe a rich farmer. Who maybe just had an amazing harvest, had built huge barns, and thought he had it made for the foreseeable future. But no. Suddenly he died. And now . . . was it his son who came to Jesus, wanting his share of these riches his father never got to enjoy? His son, making the same mistake? Looking for life and happiness and security in the wrong place? His son, the foolish apple not falling far from the foolish tree? Imagine if that was the case, and Jesus is telling a parable here, based on real life events? Think that might wake this man up and change his thinking in a hurry?

But we're not this man, and so the impact of this parable is perhaps less for us than it was for him. For we know it's right. We know it's true. We know we shouldn't be like that. But . . . do we still play the fool? Are we missing out on our ***relax, eat, drink, and be merry*** life until it is too late for us? Are we forgetting who we are? If Jesus were to tell you this parable today based on your life, how would it go? What do you think you need, what are you asking Jesus for, so that *once you get it*, then you can ***relax, eat, drink, and be merry***? A certain job or amount of success? Financial security? Family peace? The right friends, popularity, or achievement? How would *your* parable go . . . ?

Well, however it would go for you, all our parables end the same way: death. And if your life is wrapped up in the things of this world, then death is the end. Somebody else gets your stuff. All that you worked so hard for, all that you lost sleep over, all that you sacrificed for, that you didn't get to ***relax, eat, drink, and be merry*** for - somebody else gets it. And they may or may not appreciate it, or you. They may waste it. That's what vexed Solomon when he wrote Ecclesiastes. *Why am I doing this,* he asked? *What's the point?* This kind of life that ends in death is, as he described it, ***vanity and a striving after wind***.

But it doesn't have to be that way. In fact, your Father in heaven doesn't want it to be that way for you. And so He sent His Son - <u>not</u> to dish out justice in this world, to divide inheritances and make sure we get our fair share. Maybe you will, maybe you won't. Maybe you'll have more than others, maybe others will have more than you. Jesus isn't here to make sure you get what's coming to you, what you deserve - He's here to make sure you get His inheritance. He's here to be the rich man who has it all and dies, so that you can inherit His riches.

So to do that, a couple of things have to happen. First, the Son of God has to die so that you can have His inheritance. For that how inheritances work - someone dies and leaves their stuff for the heirs. So the Son of God comes down from heaven and becomes man, Jesus. And He comes not to show us how to live, how to be good or to be our example - He comes to die. And so die He does. His whole life is a journey to the cross. His whole life is to do this for you. So that you can have what's His. And since He knows His life this way, notice how Jesus lives. Isn't He usually (or always) ***relaxed, eating and drinking, and being merry***? And with sinners! Because that's who He's dying for. That's who needs His inheritance. And He wants them to know it. And to rejoice. That's His joy.

So Jesus dies. That's the first thing. But He also needs sons to receive His inheritance. But He knows we're fools. Adam and Eve proved that, throwing away a perfect world in search of something more, better. And down through the centuries, to you and me today, we keep proving it too. So we're not going to be sons if left to ourselves. We can't. We are by nature fools. So the second thing Jesus does is make us His children. Children of God. He baptizes us and we become sons of God by this new birth. Our first birth is a physical birth, sons of men, fools. Our second birth is a spiritual birth, as sons of God, in faith. Since we couldn't do that ourselves, Jesus provides that for us, too.

So at the end of His life, on the night when Jesus is betrayed, and with just hours until His crucifixion, what does Jesus do? He gives His children, His disciples, their inheritance. His last will and testament. *This is the new testament in my blood,* He says as He gives to them. And look at the disciples - how are they, what are they doing at this moment in the upper room, receiving this inheritance from Jesus? They are reclining at

the table (***relaxed***), ***eating and drinking***, and (we could say) ***being merry***. Not merry in the sense of being gleeful, but being glad in the presence of Jesus. And glad receiving from Him this gift - which is not just His Body and Blood, but everything that comes with that: the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. Soon, they're going to witness what Jesus had to do to provide that for them - His death of the cross. But then they would also be witnesses of His resurrection. Witnesses that in Him, death need <u>not</u> be the end of a foolish life, but the beginning of a life without end. The beginning of a life that death can no longer touch.

That's the life now here for you. For your rich man is here, His testament is here, His Body and Blood is here, His forgiveness is here, for you. And for this you do nothing but receive it. He is the one who died. He is the one who is the host at the meal. He is the one who gave you life, both physically and spiritually, to receive it. He simply now says to you: ***relax, eat, drink, and be merry***! This is all for you.

And so it is. A simple meal in the midst of mixed-up, cluttered lives, to cut through all the clutter and give us what we really need. And really want. We just keep looking for it in the wrong places. So that whether we have much or little, whether we are young or old, whether there are still things we want to achieve in this life or we think we've made it - no matter where you are in life, Jesus is inviting you to ***relax, eat, drink, and be merry***. Now. <u>Not</u> in the things of this world, which betray us, let us down, and come and go, but in Him who never will. In Him who gave Himself and all that He has, for you.

It is sad that so many people spend their whole lives in the pursuit of all kinds of wealth, only to come to the poverty of death. The picture of life that Solomon saw. But Jesus is exactly the opposite - the one who became poor in life for us, and with His death made us rich. And you <u>are</u>. Now. Whether you know it or not. And so while death is waiting for all of us, so is Jesus and His inheritance and His life. So ***relax, eat, drink, and be merry***, He says. I've got it covered for you.

Which doesn't mean don't do anything. That would be a rather boring and unfulfilling life. Rather, do everything with this mind, knowing who you are, what you already have, and where your life is. And so enjoy what God has given you. Use your talents and abilities. Strive to be the best you can be. Be a blessing to others. But know that these are things <u>*in*</u> your life, they are not your life. ***Christ is your life***, as St. Paul told us today. Nothing else. For nothing else can give you life. Everything else, if you look for life there, only takes away life. But Christ gives life. He gives you His life. He gives you eternal life. And ***when Christ who is your life appears,*** Paul says, ***then you also will appear with him in glory***. You will receive your inheritance in full.

So yes, ***relax, eat, drink, and be merry***! Quite right. But not only when . . . this or that . . . but <u>now</u>. Because you're a child of God - even in the midst of trouble, in the midst of death, in the midst of whatever you are going through and this sinful world is dishing out.

Jesus is here with you in the midst of it all, providing for you, serving you, saving you. So come eat and drink, Him, and depart in peace, relaxing and rejoicing in Him.

For you're a child of God and the inheritance is yours.

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.