

**One truth shared:** We cling to Christ—the one who clings to us through earthly hardships and will carry us to heaven.

*“There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores and longing to eat what fell from the rich man’s table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores.*

*“The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham’s side. The rich man also died and was buried. In Hades, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. So he called to him, ‘Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.’*

*“But Abraham replied, ‘Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been set in place, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.’*

*“He answered, ‘Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my family, for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.’*

*“Abraham replied, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.’*

*“No, father Abraham,’ he said, ‘but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.’*

*“He said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.’”*

**Luke 16:19-31**

### **What Seems to Help in Life Fails in Death; What Seems to Fail in Life Helps in Death**

June 15, 1904. The PS General Slocum, a 264-foot dual-paddle steamboat, set out with 1,300 passengers for an annual summer cruise on New York City’s East River. Not even thirty minutes after launch, that cruise took a tragic turn for the worse. It was 12-year-old Franky Paditski who first spotted signs that the ship was on fire. Franky raced to the pilot room to inform the captain, shouting “fire” all along the way—but no one paid any attention to him. He burst into the pilot room and told the captain about the fire. But the captain told Franky to get out—thinking the kid was only joking. But Franky wasn’t, an uncontrollable blaze had started within a storage room in the hull of the ship, a room that had been packed with hay insulated barrels and containers of kerosene oil—needing nothing more than a stray ember from a cigarette to ignite a surging fire that would overtake the entire ship. 1,021 people died that day.

What makes this story really sad is, it could have been avoided. The captain neglected any fire drill protocol. The crew waited too long before notifying the captain about the fire. The boat firehoses were cracked with dry-rot and burst immediately. In addition, nearly all the 2,500 life jackets on board were useless—the cork having rotted and dissolved into powder. The lifeboats were all wired in place, permanently fixed to the ship. But the error easily forgotten in this story was disregarding the warning cries of a 12-year-old boy.

Can you see the parallels between this tragic story and Jesus’ parable from Luke 16? The rich man’s wealth did him no better than a rotted-out life jacket. His confidence before God was anchored in his status, his popularity, and his prestige—but it did him no better than clinging to a lifeboat that’s been bolted to a burning ship. This rich man ignored

the warning cries of Scripture—which tell us that sin has rendered this world no better than a sinking ship in need of saving.

We don't have to look too far to see the same thing today. Sure, we know people who cling to wealth like this rich man. But money isn't the only rotted-out lifejacket. We cling to sinful self-gratification, hatred, grudges, and bitterness. We can be self-absorbed and self-righteousness. And to those who insist on clinging to faulty life jackets and useless lifeboats for life, God's Word is not silent: the result isn't life, but death—not just physical death—but spiritual and everlasting separation from God.

We neither earned nor deserved God's love. We didn't deserve even the scraps from God's table. We are beggars. But that's what makes God's undeserved love so awesome. When we would have drowned by the weight of our guilt, God, in love, reached out to save us. When sin had rendered us worse than dogs in the kingdom of God, he, in grace, opened the door to bring us in—not as strays to sit under the table, but as family to sit at the table. God sent his Son Jesus to take the sickness of our sin onto himself so—by his wounds—we would be healed. God himself would bleed to buy you a seat at his banquet and a home in his heaven.

We, like Lazarus, can cling to God's Word of promise in the midst of every storm. We can anchor our identities on sure foundation of the gospel promises embedded in Scripture and sealed by Christ's blood. So, let go of those rotted life jackets and lifeboats that ultimately can't save anyone. Cling to Jesus—the one who has saved you, and the one who will carry you through the storms of this life to the safe shores of heaven.

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, thank you for reaching out in love to rescue us from sin, death, and hell. Strengthen our faith through Word and Sacrament—assuring us that heaven belongs to us as we belong to you. Amen.

## Foundations Teen Facilitators Guide

### Year C – Proper 21

#### Hard Truth

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### What Seems to Help in Life Fails in Death; What Seems to Fail in Life Helps in Death

*Starting the Discussion: This first section is intended to be light and easy, to engage and get the conversation going. Have a little fun with these questions.*

- In what ways do people try to buy their way into heaven—or earn God's love?
- Why do you think people feel they can buy their way into heaven?

*Connecting: This section serves as a bridge between the opening conversation and the body of the study/discussion. It should get the group thinking about the topic/text even before they've looked at it.*

- For this rich man, things that seemed to help in life failed in death. How so?
- Contrast all the ways—before they died—the rich man and Lazarus were opposites.

- After they die, there's a bit of a role reversal, isn't there? In how many ways had Lazarus and this rich man traded places?

***Digging In:*** Here we want to dig into some texts or the text for the day and see what Scripture says. The questions are meant to be open ended to give a beginning of a scriptural conversation. These are a guide for a spiritual and scriptural conversation.

- In what ways is the entry into heaven beyond our ability to pay?
- What did Jesus *do* to pay our entry into his kingdom?
- What did Jesus *give* to buy us a home with him in heaven?
- For Lazarus, things that seemed to fail in life helped in death. How so?

***Conclusion:*** Here we want to wrap up the discussion, perhaps circling back to the "connecting question" above.

The chasm between us and God that sin had caused has been eternally bridged by the blood of Jesus. How does this gospel reality change our perspective as we, as Christians, experience hardships, difficulties, and suffering?