

Sermon September 28, 2025

Luke 16:19-31

"There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man's table; even the dogs would come and lick his sores.

The poor man died and was carried away by the angels to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried. In Hades, where he was being tormented, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far away with Lazarus by his side.

He called out, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in agony in these flames.'

But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that during your lifetime you received your good things and Lazarus in like manner evil things, but now he is comforted here, and you are in agony. Besides all this, between you and us a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who might want to pass from here to you cannot do so, and no one can cross from there to us.'

He said, 'Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father's house-- for I have five brothers--that he may warn them, so that they will not also come into this place of torment.'

Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the prophets; they should listen to them.' He said, 'No, father Abraham, 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, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.'"

## For A Drop of Water...

Somewhere on a city street, there is a homeless man sitting on a street corner. He is dirty and ragged and smelly. As people walk by, he calls out: "Please help me. I need money for food. Please help a poor homeless man." And he watches helplessly, as people rush by, paying no attention to his cries. Some people cross the street to get further away, some hold their personal belongings closer to their bodies, others look at him in disgust. But no one stops to help him. His cries go unheeded.

Today we heard a story about a man just like this. A man so poor and helpless, that he lies in the gateway of a rich man's estate, covered in sores. The rich man and all those who live in the area rush by and pay no attention to him. They pass by as quickly as possible to avoid the smell and the disturbance. No one stops to help him. His cries go unheeded.

How we hear this story depends on which character we relate to. If you relate to the rich man, it's pretty scary, with threats of eternal damnation. For the poor and disenfranchised, this is a story of hope and the promise of eternal blessings.

Now we are not a particularly rich congregation, but none of us are lying in doorways or over sidewalk grates, covered in sores. Many of us might not feel like we are rich but our way of life is drastically better than most people in the world. Almost a billion people live in extreme poverty today – that means they don't have enough food, water and shelter to take care of basic human needs. Almost a billion of our siblings begging for a cool drink of water.

The hard word in this Sunday's gospel is that we have, in our fallen way of doing things, responded to differences by running away from those who remind us of what we fear. Since we can't run far enough or fast enough, we dig chasms between us. The poor live on one side of the tracks and the rich on another. The poor go to one church, and the rich go to another. In

many congregations, the poor are objects of church "outreach programs"; the rich are church leaders.

We build all kinds of chasms. And, we build them around all kinds of categories that have nothing to do with social class: race or ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, disabilities, politics... the list could go on and on. We, as human beings, are very good at figuring out ways to separate ourselves from each other.

But God doesn't want us to be separate from one another. And Jesus reminds us over and over again how important it is to be in relationship with one another.

St. Teresa of Calcutta, who lived in the poorest community in the world, reminded us of this when she won the Nobel Peace Prize:

*It is not enough to say: "I love God, but I do not love my neighbor..." How can you love God whom you do not see, if you do not love your neighbor whom you see, whom you touch, with whom you live? And so this is very important for us to realize, that love, to be true, has to hurt.*

When we walk by those we are separated from and do not acknowledge them as our neighbor and as God's own child, we are falling short of the greatest commandment of all – to love God with all our hearts and soul and to love our neighbor. All of them.

The hard thing in this story is that the rich man is not described as being cruel. He doesn't kick Lazarus when he is down. He doesn't mock him or make him suffer more. *But he also doesn't love him.* He doesn't touch him... he doesn't comfort him... he doesn't feed him. And when he does not love his neighbor, the one lying in his doorway, he doesn't love God.

Whenever we dig chasms to separate us, we live a life separated from God. When we look at the vast gulf that separates us and seek to make them unbridgeable, we can be sure... very, very sure that we're on the wrong side

of the gulf. That's the difficult lesson that the rich man learned much too late. He lived a life where he could not bridge the differences and so he was condemned to live in the afterlife, looking over a vast chasm that no one could ever cross.

Being separated from our neighbor is hurtful all the way around. Isolating ourselves from our sisters and brothers in the human family doesn't make us less vulnerable; it just denies us the opportunity to see and experience that much more of the image of God. Or as Mother Teresa reminds us, *How can you love God whom you do not see, if you do not love your neighbor whom you see, whom you touch, with whom you live?*

All is not lost, my friends. Jesus tells us this story, not so we identify with the rich man or the poor man. We are not Lazarus, although we may be longing for something that is out of our reach. We are not the rich man, although we may have more than we need of material possessions.

**We are the five brothers:** we are the brothers and sisters, still living, whom the rich man wishes to warn... to save from the torment of being on one side of a chasm; Jesus tells us this to save us from the torment of being separated from God. We are the five brothers, in danger of waiting for some spectacular sign from God before we will take the message seriously.

All of us have someone sitting by our gates – someone who gives us the opportunity to fulfill the promises of our baptismal covenant, when we to promises to seek and serve Christ in all people... to respect the dignity of every person, no matter who they are.

The rich man's warnings are ringing in our ears. What can we do in response?

We have a choice in how we respond: we can build bridges or dig deeper chasms. We can choose to love now and not wait for heaven.

When we separated ourselves from one another and from God, God sent the prophets to plead, to shout, to remind us that God made us for justice

and peace in community. As the chasms expanded, God sent us Jesus, whose life, death, and resurrection shows us that no human power can dig a chasm too broad or too deep to be bridged in God's grace.

This story is hard to hear, but there is also an invitation to engage God's mission of healing, justice, and reconciliation in the world. And the wonderful thing is that the cool water for which the rich man longs, the peace and freedom and joy that Lazarus enjoys as God's gift, is available to us now -- a taste of grace that nourishes hope -- whenever we seek justice for the poor, whenever we strive to live in reconciled and reconciling community. Thanks be to God!