

May We Risk Going Beyond the Walls of our Lives

Luke 16: 19-31

Lazarus and the Rich Man

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The arrogance of wealth does not help. Instead, it functions like a pair of polarizing sunglasses, eliminating the bright, refracted, horizontal light of the rest of the world. When Lazarus and the rich man were on the same plane, the horizontal plane, the rich man did not see him.

Instead, as the rich man came and went from his sumptuous feasts, held day after day at his palatial home, he took little to no notice of Lazarus. Lazarus lying by his gate, surrounded by dogs, famished, forlorn, with sores weeping and oozing. The rich man took as much notice of Lazarus as he might of a pile of rags on the side of a road. His wealth prevented him from seeing.

But now that the rich man has died and he finds himself in hades, tormented and parched. Now he can see. And he looks up, there in the arms of Father Abraham is Lazarus, whose name he knew, but whose needs he ignored.

Believing that the world has not changed and it is still his to command, the rich man asks Father Abraham to send Lazarus down to wet his tongue and alleviate some of his pain. Oh, there is an awakening, ever so rude, heading the Rich man's way.

Father Abraham replies, "There is now a great chasm that is fixed between us and no one can pass from here to you, nor can anyone pass from you to here."

What Father Abraham doesn't say, but what we know is those great chasms between wealth and poverty, middle income and low income, rental homes and trailer parks, children with lunches and children without, though hard to cross can be bridged in life, if we try. If we see, if we notice people along the side.

The rich man knew who Lazarus was, but it's only in his peril and torment that he acknowledges him and calls him by name. Only then.

The rich man undeterred by the chasm, bids Father Abraham to command Lazarus to do something else, if he can't come give him water, he wants Father Abraham to tell Lazarus to go to his family and tell them to change their ways to that way avoid this torment. It's kind of a Marley to Ebenezer Scrooge kind of moment, except the rich man from the pits of hades, is still trying to command the poor man to do his bidding. And as Pastor Wally Gilbert of Church of the Messiah says, the rich man didn't want Lazarus to go tell all the world about what might happen to them, but only the Rich Man's family. Warn only them.

Even in Hell the rich man is only thinking of himself and his close family. Missing completely the Shema—the great commandment, "To love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your mind and all your soul, and to love your neighbor as yourself."

The rich man seeks only to care for his own.

Friends, I fear that I and perhaps you may not see all the suffering of the world around us. Or worse we see it, have no idea how to address it and go back to pretending that we do not know a truth that unaddressed is rotting our souls. Despair at the enormity of the world's pain, cynicism that nothing can be done, can be covers we pull over our eyes to shield ourselves from the world's pain.

Yet we, who follow Christ, are called to see, to hear, analyze and to respond. To use what gifts and resources we have to address, bit by bit, morning by morning the ills of our world as best we can day after day.

We may feel as if we can do very little, but even the dogs, offered care and warmth to Lazarus as he lay ignored at the Rich Man's gate.

What ills might we today, choose to see?

What sins and sadness might we open our ears to hear?

What gifts and resources do we have as individuals, how might we join together? How might we as communities of faith respond to:

Loneliness, Isolation
depression, despair,
fear, anxiety
hunger, lack of shelter
unchecked gun violence
drug use,
poverty, war?

We can only do what we can do, but we can do, what we can and we must together act. For we follow Jesus Christ who called us to see each other, love each other, and act for and with each other. The Gospel really does not matter unless we who claim to believe are embodying it morning by morning.

May we risk going beyond the walls of our lives.

Amen.