

Sunday Lesson – March 14, 2021

GOSPEL: Luke 16: 19-31

Rich Man and Lazarus

Background

“Two very important charges have been laid down against the scoffing Pharisees in verses 15-18: (1) They have sought the approval of men (based upon what men can see—appearances), not of God (based upon the heart). (2) They have set aside the revelation of God, which exposes the heart. The parable of the rich man and Lazarus graphically illustrates both of these points” *(Excerpts from bible.org/seriespage/52-rich-man-and-lazarus-luke-1614-31)*

Insight

“*Seeing*, in this Gospel, is a very big deal. Because before you can have compassion for people, you have to see them, acknowledging their presence, needs, and gifts and above all their status of children of God worthy of respect and dignity. This the rich man utterly fails to do. Which leads me to conclude that the chasm between them in this parabolic description of the afterlife is only a dramatization of the one that existed before, to the detriment of both, for no good comes from setting barriers between the children of God. And this may be Luke’s point all along, less warning us about punishment in the next life than urging us to the abundant life in this one that comes only in seeing those around us as God’s beloved children deserving our care, attention, and fellowship. This parable isn’t about earning or relinquishing an eternal reward; it’s about the character and quality of our life right now. One might even argue that for Luke eternal life isn’t a distant reality at all but rather starts now, each time we embrace the abundant life God offers in and through those around us. So while it is certainly a warning not to overlook those around us in need, it is also an invitation to live



into fuller, more meaningful, and more joyous life by sharing ourselves – our time, talents, and certainly our wealth – with those around us here and now. For as we do, we live into the life and kingdom God outlines in the law of Moses, clarifies in the prophets, and makes manifest and available to all in the life, death, and resurrection of our Lord.” *(Excerpts from davidlose.net/2019/09/pentecost-19-c-eternal-life-now/)*

Gospel Reading

“There once was a rich man, expensively dressed in the latest fashions, wasting his days in conspicuous consumption. A poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, had been dumped on his doorstep. All he lived for was to get a meal from scraps off the rich man’s table. His best friends were the dogs who came and licked his sores. “Then he died, this poor man, and was taken up by the angels to the lap of Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried. In hell and in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham in the distance and Lazarus in his lap. He called out, ‘Father Abraham, mercy! Have mercy! Send Lazarus to dip his finger in water to cool my tongue. I’m in agony in this fire.’ “But Abraham said, ‘Child, remember that in your lifetime you got the good things and Lazarus the bad things. It’s not like that here. Here he’s consoled and you’re tormented. Besides, in all these matters there is a huge chasm set between us so that no one can go from us to you even if he wanted to, nor can anyone cross over from you to us.’ “The rich man said, ‘Then let me ask you, Father: Send him to the house of my father where I have five brothers, so he can tell them the score and warn them so they won’t end up here in this place of torment.’ “Abraham answered, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets to tell them the score. Let them listen to them.’ “‘I know, Father Abraham,’ he said, ‘but they’re not listening. If someone came back to them from the dead, they would change their ways.’ “Abraham replied, ‘If they won’t listen to Moses and the Prophets, they’re

not going to be convinced by someone who rises from the dead.” The Message

What It Could Mean?

“The rich man performed his daily ritual knowing (and perhaps seeing) that a food- and shelter-insecure poor man was loitering around his gates in hopes of receiving edible bits of compassion or salve for the sores that tattooed his body. But the only mercy Lazarus received came from the dogs that licked his sores (16:21).

From the narrative sequence, Lazarus dies first and the rich man later. The latter has a (lavish) burial, but the angels claim Lazarus’s body and transport him into the intimate presence of Abraham, their common ancestor (16:22; see also 3:34). The rich man’s genealogical relation to Father Abraham is tenuous given his failure to repent and demonstrate compassion toward the poor (3:7-9).

The rich man died believing himself superior to the poor whom he does not regard as human or worthy of mercy. He died believing the underclass exists to slave for him and not to eat from his table (see also 17:7-10).

Abraham responds to the rich man, addressing him as a child (*teknon*) in recognition of a hierarchical kinship (16:25). The rich man enjoyed good things (*ta agatha*) during his lifetime. Conversely, Lazarus experienced evil/bad things (*ta kaka*). In the afterlife, they each experience status reversal (16:25; see also 1:46-55). In Hades the chasm between the once rich and previously poor remains vast (16:26). Abraham rejects the rich man’s command; Lazarus will not cross the chasm to serve him.

When the rich man realizes that his existence in Hades is an eternal reversal of the life he lived on earth, he pleads for Abraham to send Lazarus (like a slave) to his father’s house to warn him and his five brothers so they do not also end up in Hades (16:27-28)! He still does not get it; Lazarus is not his slave! Abraham responds, in essence, that they better read the

Torah and the prophetic literature differently than you did. Moses and the prophets call the people to do justice, to love God and love one’s neighbor as one loves oneself (16:29). Treat others as one desires to be treated (6:31). Again, the rich man is anthropologically and theologically tone deaf. He retorts: but if you send them somebody who has died, they will believe and change their minds and behavior (repent) (16:30).

While Moses and the prophets are dead, through their words or prophetic oracles they still speak (16:31). Jesus said “the Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor” (Luke 4:18).” (*Excerpts from workingpreacher.org by Mitzi J. Smith*)

Readings for Further Study

- **Proverbs 17:5/22:9/22: 22-23/29:7/31: 8-9** *God loves the poor and is offended when His children neglect them*
- **Matthew 25: 35-40** *Showing mercy to the poor in effect ministering to Christ*
- **James 4:14/Matthew 16:26/Mark 8:36/1 John 5: 11-12** *Lives are a mist for a little while/what good if man gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul/He who has the Son has life.*

Thought for the Day

“Always pray to have eyes that see the best in people, a heart that forgives the worst, a mind that forgets the bad, and a soul that never loses faith in God” ~ *Unknown*

A Prayer

Divine Word, you sent Moses to speak law to the people and bring order to chaos. You sent prophets to speak repentance and bring hope to the hopeless. You sent your son, Jesus, to become your living Word. Open our ears to hear your word, and our hearts to reflect the light of your truth to others, for the sake of the Incarnate Word, Jesus Christ. **Amen.**