

*Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.*

The Gospel according to Luke contains some of the best-loved parables told to us by Jesus. However today, within our appointed Gospel lesson, I would have to say that this one today, along with the one from last week, do NOT qualify as some of those beloved parables of Jesus. Today we have another parable before us that might just make us ask...why do we have a parable like this today? What is the intent of this parable that Jesus is teaching us and where is the Good News in this parable? Spoiler alert folks...revenge is NOT the Good News, although we like to think it that it is especially for Lazarus, but this is not the Good News of Jesus Christ!

On Holy Cross Sunday a few weeks ago, we heard in the Gospel of John that, Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him, (John 3:17)...showing us that salvation is not about *MY* revenge on those I dislike and those who disagree with me, it's about the cross and who Jesus is.

Whether we like it or NOT, as we put our revenge aside, we find ourselves once again as the villain in this parable. So, what does this mean? What is Jesus teaching us today with this parable?

We all know what a parable is. We all, for the most part, know how they are to work, or we assume to know how they work. Sadly though, with a parable like we have today, if we can't figure it out or make it bend to our favor; we simply disregard it. But the million-dollar question today is...why...why does Jesus throw this parable at us today? I believe that Jesus is teaching us what He has always taught us, love God and love your neighbor and to avoid becoming this rich man in this parable we might find ourselves asking once again...who is my neighbor...or perhaps more specifically, do I even have a neighbor? But herein lies the heart or the "why" of the parable...are we asking because we really want to know and love our neighbor, or are we afraid of ending up like the rich man in this parable? In other words, do we love God out of fear or love? Moreover, do we truly love God, or is it just an item to be checked off the list to be a good person?

Once again, like last week, we are searching for that high ground that allows us to roll out from under the weight of this parable that seems to condemn us all because like it or not, we are the bad guy in this parable...especially this parable because the rich man has no name and the poor beggar does. While Lazarus is the person we all want to be in this parable, the rich man with no name is the place for us to fill in our name. This parable before us today is the only parable of Jesus with a person named within it, and that is the poor man named Lazarus, making our place in this parable even more obvious. This name Lazarus, is derived from the Hebrew name, El-azar, meaning, "God has helped." I don't think this is a random choice or chosen by accident.<sup>1</sup> God has obviously helped Lazarus in this lesson before us today...where then is God helping us?

The answer to this question is the "why" of the parable, the reason Jesus teaches with it. I believe that one of the hurdles to get over when looking at this parable is that we feel good about the rich man getting his dues and Lazarus sitting in the bosom of Abraham. We can feel good about the outcome for the rich man because his greed is easier to discuss because it belongs to someone else, and it's not ours. But what about our greed? What does our greed look like? Can we position ourselves away from this rich man simply because his greed is not ours...but what about our greed

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<sup>1</sup> Hultgren, Arlund J., *The Parables of Jesus, A Commentary*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000. Page 111

and what does our greed look like? What are the gates that shelter us from the world out there?

Our greed may not be purple clothes of fine linen or sumptuous meals, our greed may just be our opinions and our gate may just be our self-righteousness that keeps “those people” away from us. You know those people...those Democrats, those Republicans, those gay and trans folks, those folks who think they are all that, those alcoholics, those drug addicts, and crack-heads that hang out on the streets and make us walk around them, those Catholics, those happy-clappy folks who attend those big worship centers, those snotty self-righteous people who call themselves “good” Christians, those people who simply annoy us and disagree with us, you know these people...those people out there that we want no part of...you know who those folks are. Looking closer at *those folks*, are they the ones that we ourselves will be begging to dip their finger in the water to cool our tongues? How much stuff is laying at the metaphorical gates of our lives that we don’t even know about? This is why Jesus is teaching us this parable...to recognize this in ourselves and to turn ourselves away from this...but are we really listening to the one who is raised from the dead.

The thing that I find most disconcerting about this parable is that we gravitate to Lazarus...he is the person we want to be in this situation because we see and we feel his revenge as a good thing. Listen to folks coming from a court of law or a trial where they have not received the outcome or the judgment that they thought they should have gotten, they generally say, “Oh, they’ll get theirs when they stand before God on judgment day!” What they are actually saying is, they will get “MY” revenge from God’s judgment! But will they? Or will they get the same forgiveness you yourself will get?

In our false righteousness we see the Good News of this parable in the revenge that Lazarus experiences and we view eternal life that will allow us to avenge all those who have wronged us. However, when I read this, it is I who has plenty to eat and clothes that cover my body that is free of sores, or open wounds, and my dogs are pets, not colleagues. So as I read this and worked through this parable, I keep asking myself, where is forgiveness and salvation for this rich man, because this rich man is me? Is poverty my way to salvation?

Today this parable is showing us that this life has blessed us with so many things. Unfortunately, our “so-called-blessings” make us so self-consumed and our consumer culture is developing “new hankerings” that we see as “blessings” all the time. Our culture is being bombarded and saturated with advertisements that don’t just address our desires but they also create new desires, new hankerings that we would never have had without the enticing ads that amplify self-satisfaction and self-importance, all while leaving us insensitive to others. More importantly, our culture and our technology that is designed to “improve” our society has become the GATE that merely isolates the haves from the have nots.

It seems odd to me that we are living on one side of this great chasm of isolation that Jesus is teaching today but we don’t even see it for the most part. We too have Moses and the prophets but do we know who they are, let alone listen to them? Even when someone comes from the dead, have we repented...or have we gone about our self-centered life?

Jesus teaches us today that we are not Lazarus and we are on the other side of the gate today ignoring what is out there...maybe now we will listen and take to heart what is being said about

the things around us and the situation we are all in. Let's start listening at verse 20, And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores,<sup>21</sup> who longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man's table...(Luke 16:20-21a). The English translation for me leaves a great deal of information out of this parable that only elevates the revenge within this parable which as I said earlier, is NOT the Good News. When reading verse 20 directly from the Greek and once again, using all the proper grammatical rules, this is how it parses out for me:

This poor man, or this pitiful or inferior man, on the other hand, named Lazarus was laid beside the gate, himself covered with sores.

The verb "laid" is the same verb used to depict a person confined to their sickbed...meaning, Lazarus did not just show up at the gate each day hoping for a hand out...someone laid him there.

Another factor that gets lost in this parable is the habits and tradition of that time. In verse 21 we hear that Lazarus,<sup>21</sup> ...longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man's table. It was the habit at that time, before napkins or paper towels, to take chunks of bread and wipe the table clean of the drippings of spilled wine or other crumbs that would be found on the table after a "sumptuous meal" and then throw the bread to the dogs.

The final point I want to make about this parable is that this parable comes from a story about the fate of the rich and the poor in the afterlife found in various traditions and literatures. A story of this kind is expressed in an old Egyptian tale that was told long before the time of Jesus in so many different ways and traditions.<sup>2</sup>

With that said, for this Gospel of Luke, we hear this struggle between the rich and the poor, but wealth is not sinful, what we do with it can be. So, is this then a chasm that leaves us fixed in our sin? The chasm that was fixed and unmovable in this parable has been bridged by a cross. As we hear in the morning prayer office of Matins and the opening of the letter to the Hebrews,

<sup>1</sup> Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets,<sup>2</sup> but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds.<sup>3</sup> He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word.  
(Hebrews 1:1-3)

We also hear Paul telling the Galatians:

<sup>11</sup> Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law; for 'The one who is righteous will live by faith.'<sup>12</sup> But the law does not rest on faith; on the contrary, 'Whoever does the works of the law will live by them.'<sup>13</sup> Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree'—<sup>14</sup> in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.  
(Galatians 3:11-14)

Asking then, why this parable, to show us all that Jesus has bridged that chasm between the haves and the have nots. He is once again moving the stuff of our lives that make us feel so important, the stuff that becomes a gate that isolates us, Jesus is teaching us once again to love God and to love each other. In his words to us today through this parable, we like Lazarus, have not come on

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid, page 111

our own, our self-righteousness, our self-centeredness, and our sin brings us all to the foot of the cross where we are mere beggars longing for the morsels of bread that will fall from this table that is before us. From that table falls chunks of bread that are placed into our hands. Into our hands is the body and blood of Christ Jesus, the very blessing of Abraham, so that we receive the promise of the Spirit through faith that says in that moment, it is so. From the table of this rich man we know as God we are all fed from this Holy Meal that is the bread of life and the cup of salvation.

*In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit .  
Amen*