

Pastor Jon's Sermon from Sunday, September 25, 2022.

“The Rich Man and Lazarus”

We took a trip to Madison on Friday to see our son, Eli, because we missed him. So we took him out of dinner near the capitol. There are a lot of nice restaurants around there. We ate at a place called the Old Fashioned. We waited 45 minutes for a table and hung around outside. It was a beautiful night and we took some pictures with the capitol in the background. But there were a handful of beggars that came around asking for money, and one woman asked us for a cigarette. It made me a little anxious as I was trying to protect our comfortable little bubble as we waited to feast sumptuously. I saw the beggars, responded to them politely, but didn't give them anything. I normally don't have cash anyway. It's tough, however, when Jesus teaches in the Sermon on the Mount, give to everyone who begs from you... it always puts you in a moral dilemma.

Personally, I believe in partnering with or giving to organizations or missions that know these people by name. They know where they live. They are on front lines and know what true help looks like for them. That is why I appreciate our partnerships in Neenah with the Bletzinger House, Fox Valley Community Table, and Pillars. Our teachers and public safety officers also know people by name. They are on the front lines. They too can identify need and ways to help.

In our Gospel today we have another parable of Jesus about wealth and poverty. Frankly I am tired of preaching on this topic. But this one has a twist. It involves the death of both the rich man and the beggar named Lazarus. Already we have a reversal of fortunes. The one with power and privilege on earth is now unnamed and sitting in Hades. And the one who is considered less than on earth has a name... Lazarus and he is righteous and in heaven. The rich man, who dressed in purple who feasted sumptuously every day on earth was blind to the need of the beggar with leprosy outside his gates. The rich man's wealth and privilege blinded him from truly seeing the beggar Lazarus and feeding him.

In the parable, both die at the same time... you know the story... the beggar is in heaven with Abraham and the rich man is in hell. There is a great chasm between them that no human can travail. There are no do overs after you die. The problem in the parable is focused on

the rich man. Even after death, the rich man still thinks he has power to order Abraham and the beggar around. He still sees himself above the beggar. He piously begs Abraham to send Lazarus to dip his hand in cold water and give me a drink. Or to go and warn the rich man's five brothers of their impending doom if they do not repent.

You see, the audience of this parable is Jesus' disciples and the Pharisees. The Pharisees were rejecting Jesus as God's Son and his teachings. The Pharisees had a listening problem to Jesus and their own scriptures. They had the laws of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms, but clearly didn't listen to them or act on them.

In Psalm 146, we are reminded of the heart of God.

¹Praise the LORD! Praise the LORD, O my soul!

²I will praise the LORD as long as I live; I will sing praises to my God all my life long.

³Do not put your trust in princes, in mortals, in whom there is no help.

This is such a good reminder as we listen to political commercials ad nauseum on TV telling us to fear how bad the other candidate is for you. Do not put your ultimate trust in princes or Mortals. They will always fall short of our expectations. But...

⁵Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD their God.

Happy can also be translated as blessed. Our hope is in a God who...

⁷who executes justice for the oppressed; who gives food to the hungry. The LORD sets the prisoners free;

⁸the LORD opens the eyes of the blind. The LORD lifts up those who are bowed down; the LORD loves the righteous.

⁹The LORD watches over the strangers; he upholds the orphan and the widow, but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.

How do you think the Lord does this? Welcome the stranger, feed the hungry, lift up the bowed down? Through us.

The Pharisees knew these words in scripture, but they didn't listen to them or act on them. They didn't hear God's calling to lift up those who are bowed down, to care for the widow and orphan.

Debi Thomas on the website, Journey With Jesus, said about this text, "But what I appreciate most is that it's an *urgent* story. It doesn't mince words about what's at stake. It doesn't pretend that our years are limitless and our options infinite. This is a story about time running out. About alternatives closing down. This is a story for us."

Our material wealth can blind us from the fundamental inability to see human need, human suffering, human dignity, and human worth — as real.

Thomas continues "Perhaps this is why Jesus crosses over the great chasm again and again, offering us a way forward. A way of selflessness. A way of sacrifice. A way of losing our lives in order to gain them."

The grace in this text is in the warning itself. We still have time to make amends, open our eyes, to share our gifts.

Siblings in Christ, we have God's Word. We have Moses. We have the prophets. We have the psalms and parables. We have the Gospel. We have the life, the death, and the resurrection of Jesus. We have God's grace, we have Holy Communion, we have forgiveness, and we have eyes to see and ears to hear those who are struggling in our midst and may we lend a helping hand.

Amen!