

The Rev. Kristin Krantz
St. James', Mt. Airy
9/25/16
Outside worship in the Memorial Garden

Proper 21C
Jeremiah 32:1-3A, 6-15
Psalm 91:1-6, 14-16
1 Timothy 6:6-19
Luke 16:19-31

**Gracious God, take our minds and think through them;
take our hands and work through them;
take our hearts and set them on fire.
Amen.**

Last week's Gospel passage ended with: *You cannot serve God and wealth.*

Which begs the question, what can you serve along with God?

Today we get a glimpse of that, with the answer being twofold: When you serve one another and justice, you serve God.

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The parable we are presented with today is all about reversals. The poor man is named (and is in fact the only person named in any of the parables), while the rich man is not. The rich man is dressed in purple, while the poor man is "dressed in sores." The rich man feasts sumptuously, while Lazarus, looking up, longs to be satisfied with what falls from the table. The rich man has a proper burial, while Lazarus is carried away by angels. By the end of the story, Lazarus, the poor man, is looking down from heaven, and the rich man is the one looking up, begging.¹

This reversal of fortunes is a common theme in Luke's gospel. The story of the rich man and Lazarus exemplifies the promise of such reversals found in Mary's song, the *Magnificat*:

¹ G. Penny Nixon, Homiletical Perspective, *Feasting on the Word, Year C Volume 4*.

*He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.
He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,
and lifted up the lowly;
he has filled the hungry with good things,
and sent the rich away empty.²*

This duality presented between rich and poor, is not only about the eschatological balancing of the scales of justice, however. It presents us with the moral challenge of seeing, then making visible, the invisible suffering of the world.³

As Biblical scholar John Donahue points out, “One of the prime dangers of wealth is that it causes blindness.”⁴ The rich man is not depicted as an evil person; he simply **did not see** the man at his gate.

Never having to see the poor – **the OTHER of any type** – is a privilege afforded by privilege.

It is a terrible privilege to be able to choose what to see and what not to see. We do this in so many ways. It can be as simple as averting our eyes when we see a panhandler, and as profound as our choice of where we live or what parts of town we drive through.

² Luke 1:51-53, NRSV.

³ Scott Bader-Saye, Theological Perspective, *Feasting on the Word, Year C Volume 4*.

⁴ Charles B. Cousar, Exegetical Perspective, *Feasting on the Word, Year C Volume 4*.

Because like it or not, and whether you consider yourself rich or not, all of us gathered here today have more in common with the rich man than with Lazarus. This parable is a warning for us, that if we do not cross the chasm between rich and poor, between **us** and all the other **thems** we separate ourselves from, in this life – we will surely not be able to cross it in the next.⁵

Because these boundaries we create don't just separate us from one another, they separate us from God.

From the God who told this story:

Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. 'Teacher,' he said, 'what must I do to inherit eternal life?'²⁶ He said to him, 'What is written in the law? What do you read there?'²⁷ He answered, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.'²⁸ And he said to him, 'You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.'

²⁹But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, 'And who is my neighbor?'³⁰ Jesus replied, 'A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead.³¹ Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.³² So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.³³ But a Samaritan while travelling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity.³⁴ He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them.

⁵ G. Penny Nixon, Homiletical Perspective, *Feasting on the Word, Year C Volume 4*.

Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. ³⁵The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, "Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend." ³⁶Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?' ³⁷He said, 'The one who showed him mercy.' Jesus said to him, 'Go and do likewise.'⁶

And also the God who said this:

³¹"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. ³²All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, ³³and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. ³⁴Then the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; ³⁵for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, ³⁶I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.' ³⁷Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? ³⁸And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? ³⁹And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?' ⁴⁰And the

⁶ Luke 10:25-37, NRSV.

*king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.'*⁷

These stories show us God's justice, and the justice we are meant to be working for here and now. As long as we are content to stay in the safety of our choice to not see the suffering of others, for as long as we ignore their cries of anguish, we are condemning ourselves.

But if we have ears to hear, and eyes to see, and hearts that are not hard, we will change – and we will work for change.

This is the sacrament of discomfort: making outwardly visible those things that would be invisible if we let them stay that way.

And so, we will bring food to fill the pantry at Mt. Airy Net, and we will ask the hard questions about a system that benefits from the working poor.

We will stand in our place of privilege and listen to the stories of those who are different than us and accept that we can't tell others how to feel about their experience just to make ourselves comfortable.

We will search within our hearts for the walls we have created, and we will ask God to help us pull them down stone by stone, board by board, until our hearts are free to love as God loves us.

Theologian Richard Rohr offers it this way: "The Reign of God has much more to do with right relationship than with being privately right. It has much

⁷ Matthew 25:31-46, NRSV.

more to do with being connected than with being personally correct. Can you feel the total difference between these two? The one encourages an impossible notion of individual salvation and creates individualists, the other introduces cosmic salvation and creates humans, citizens, caretakers, neighbors, and saints.”

My prayer is that we choose to be humans, citizens, caretakers, neighbors, and saints.

~ AMEN ~