

Amos 6:1a,4-7

Luke 16:19-31

1 Timothy 6:6-19

“Lord, you set prisoners free,
give sight to the blind, and
you lift up those who are bowed down.” AMEN!

It must be close to stewardship month. :-)

The texts from Luke these past few Sundays
have been circling around the evil that comes
with having excessive wealth and joy
which flows from good stewardship.

Many churches are talking about the truth
that loving money is the root of all evil
while communicating ways the church
would love to have your money. :-)

So, whether it's a church, an individual,
or other organization, we are reminded
by Jesus in the gospel today,
about what can happen when

human beings love money more than God.

In the story, we have two extremes:
the opulent unnamed man and
the dirt poor Lazarus.

Two polar opposites on the wealth spectrum.

It's great parable material to have these two extremes.
And, just when we are beginning
to figure out that Luke, the gospel writer, is
telling us that having money means you'll

suffer in the afterlife and being poor means
you'll rest on Abraham's bosom,

Jesus pulls us back to address an even bigger question:

What has taken place in our lives
that has led us to repent? (Pause)

Each one of us have grown and matured.

Changed, and perhaps even improved,
in the ability to love, forgive, and have balance.

The rich man in the parable never
did the work of growth and maturity.

With the wealth he had options and luxuries that
gave him permission to step over Lazarus
as though he was expendable.

The parable allows us to wonder if the rich man
gave Lazarus food from time to time but it
was always from the other side of the gate.

The rich man probably gave Lazarus
a job or two on occasion.

Maybe deliver a message to a neighbor or carry out
an order at the market; some menial task
for the estate.

Anything that communicated, I control you,
he allowed.

It was a relationship that worked
as long as Lazarus' health and circumstance
permitted him to do these things.

But now, Lazarus is spent.

He's covered in sores and dying of hunger and disease.

Lazarus has played his last card in order to survive.

And the rich man, with his gate, never
really needed him anyway.

So now Lazarus was nothing more
than something to step over... or step on. (Pause)

It might sound strange to say,
I don't think Jesus tells this parable to reveal
that being rich is a sin.

What was/is the sin is to look upon other people
as somehow lesser than ourselves.

Christ reminds us today to “see” the human beings
around us who are in dire need.

Whether it is because of illness, race,
documentation, or socio-economic circumstances

we can be charitable and giving but still find
ourselves de-humanizing the other.

At the congregation I served as youth director
in Seminole, Fl
we had a Lazarus.

His name is James.

I would try to ignore James.

I tried to keep communication as brief
as possible with him because (well)

I guess I thought I had more important things to attend to.

But, James would call me from time to time and say,

“Good morning, Tom. This is St. James from the Bible.”

I’d chuckle and say, “Hi James!”

But would secretly wonder, “Who says such a thing?”

James would occasionally ask for rides

to church on Sunday and to work with
the gardeners on Thursday around the church.

I would pick him up and take him to
the assisted living place he lived and someone
else would get him for church.

There was this one particular Thursday when I
must have lamented to Pastor Chip about having
to go and pick-up James.

Maybe I was concerned about the time lost on riding
the mower, I don't really remember.

But what I will never forget is what Pastor Chip said
to me during my time of "perceived" burden.

He said, "We need people like James at Good Shepherd."

It took me a number of years to come
to understanding that wisdom fully.

You see, I was doing a decent thing and
I had well-meaning intentions but I wasn't
really "seeing" James and I wasn't seeing him
as my brother.

Jesus teaches us today to "see" the Lazarus' around us.

To remember to be compassionate and
to stop dehumanizing. (Pause)

Chances are you know someone who is not
well off financially.

Someone without shelter, or needs some clothes
or a bath.

Yes, we all have a Lazarus around that
we don't necessarily intend to look down upon...
but still want to keep on the other side of
the fence.

We are comfortable knowing they need us,
but Jesus tells us we need Lazarus.

For the James', and the Lazarus', will be
Christ to us teaching us the love of God and
helping us to remove the gates we have built.

Or, in other words, help us to repent. (Pause)

You see, when we hear that word, repent,
we often think of conversion, but it's really God's
call for us to experience ethical transformation.

We are invited to examine our own life choices
and actions in light of the reality that our time
is limited in which to live well.

Openly, honestly, with love on our sleeves.

The short life we are blessed to live will allow
only so many opportunities to do the right thing.

It's not too late to pay attention.

It's not too late for us to share so others might flourish.

It's not too late to challenge economic and
business practices that bring massive wealth to
a few while the many others experience
crushing poverty without relief. (Pause)

Do I have regrets? Of course, maybe you do, too.

Let the parable do its unfinished work on you,
until we answer the question: How will we respond?

AMEN!

A woman sat in the cancer center weeping because she had been told that the treatments prescribed were not working and she just elected to stop them altogether and live out the rest of her days without medical intervention. When I saw her weeping I stopped to console her thinking she perhaps regretted her decision or perhaps she feared death. The brave woman told me, "I am not crying because I am going to die. I cry because I never really lived." (Pause) We get a sense of how to really live today. To trust God to tear down the gates and bridge the chasm we have created between us and with God. The rich man in the parable didn't learn the truth that God comes to us in both love and suffering until after he died. We don't have to wait til death to make that connection and see how life and death are two ways we learn to give ourselves away.

AMEN!