

“We will praise the Lord as long as we live;
singing praises to God all the day long.” AMEN!

There is a Jewish tale that tells of
a man once caught for stealing.

The king ordered the man
to be hanged for his crime.

Before going to the gallows the thief said to
the governor of the territory that he knew
a wonderful secret and it would be a pity
for him to allow it to die with him.

“Let me tell the secret to the king,” he said.

The governor being cautious - sensed a scam,
so the thief told him a bit more.

He would plant a pomegranate seed in the ground
and by means of the secret taught to him
by his father, it would make the fruit tree
grow and bear fruit overnight.

Thinking of the possibilities of an overnight crop,
the governor decided to take the thief to the king.

The next day the king, with all of his high
officers and agents came to the place where

the thief was waiting for them.

The thief took a shovel and dug a hole and said,
“This seed must be put in the ground by the one
who has never stolen or taken anything that
does not belong to him.

Being a thief, I cannot be
the one to plant the seed.”

So, with seed in hand,
he turned to the governor, who said
that in his younger days he had taken
something that did not belong to him.

The treasurer was asked next, but
he said that in dealing with such large
sums of money he might have entered
too much or too little in the records.

He was not qualified either.

The king was asked, but the king admitted
that when he was a youngster he had
kept a necklace belonging to his father.

The thief then said,
“You are all mighty and powerful and want
nothing yet not one of you
can plant the seed.

But I, who have stolen a little food because
I was starving am to be hanged.”

The king pleased with the wisdom teaching
and prudence of the thief, pardoned him. (Pause)

Jesus said, “Let the one without sin
cast the first stone.”

We know it, but we humans forget it everyday.

Today we have the gift of another parable from Jesus.

A teaching story that speaks of the
human condition that we are all under.

That is, we are unable to avoid sin.

No matter what we do,
how hard we pray,
we are unable to avoid sin.

Most people know that there
are certainly sinful actions.

Some people try to avoid those actions or
work to correct them.

But there is another category of sin that
has nothing to do with action.

That is the sin of inaction.

Failures to do things that are necessary
when situations present themselves is
the problem Jesus talks about
here in this parable.

You see, too often we skip all the way
to the end... to the part about a heaven and a hell.

“Look here is proof!
Jesus tells about it in a parable!”

We then find ourselves asking,
“How do I get to the one and avoid the other?”

And we get all tied up trying to conclude
who’s the good guy and who’s
the bad guy in the parable, right?

But there is much more to the parable than
this simplistic interpretation.

What has the rich man done wrong?
What has Lazarus done that is so virtuous?

To conclude that simply being rich is cursed and
being poor is a magical key to heaven
really misses Jesus’ whole point.

We get so concerned about avoiding hell...

so we think Jesus' main point is
a reward/punishment binary.

That's not the point...

He takes on the mantle of the prophets and
the true spirit of the Law which continually
asks you and me:

What is the purpose of your life?
What is the purpose of my life? (Pause)

It's not about what life will be after death...
it's about life right now! (Pause)

We cannot ignore the reality noted a few verses earlier
in Luke where we were told that the Pharisees
were lovers of money and they began
ridiculing Jesus.

It's not hard to consider their response,
because it plays out in our minds every time
we pass by someone with a sign
asking for spare change.

We tell ourselves,

“They'll just use the money for drugs.”

Thinking that if they can stand there all day,
why can't they get a job?

Then we avoid eye contact...

We can't even affirm their presence.

Jesus' parable tells us that such behavior,
the behavior of complacency and indifference...
is the sin of omission.

You see, the rich man didn't kick Lazarus,
he didn't call the cops on him,
he didn't yell at him...

His sin was he didn't see him at all. (Pause)

In his sumptuous living and careless style,
he did not even turn an eye upon
the man right outside his gate.

You see, in the ancient world it was
the role of the wealthy to provide alms
for the poor in their community.

“Even if it was a system that was self-serving,
patronage was an expected means for some of
the poor to be fed while the wealthy
reinforced their status as being virtuous.”

Jesus tells us how Lazarus longed
to have his hunger satisfied with the scraps
that fell from the rich man's table.

How easy, it didn't even take extra cost,
he simply could have saved the scraps
to make a life-difference for Lazarus.

Have you come to appreciate
these parables from Jesus?

I have.

The string of parables that began
about a month ago were hard to understand
and full of stings, but now they are proving
to be quite clear for us to answer
the Bible's continuing question:

What is the purpose, the focus, of your life?

If it is to love money and live sumptuous lives
ridiculing the teaching of Jesus and being
blind to those who suffer around us,
then there will be consequences.

There's no doubt that it is a challenge.

Jesus challenges us to be Christ-like.

In our words and in our service and in our seeing.

And it is clear, God is not finished with us.

66 years and going strong is St. Stephen!

So hear the words of promise that when
we wake up from complacency we see the
most faithful Christian communities helping,
serving, and feeding.

Even when prices are high and when
we feel burned out

we find hope and promise in the gift of the Spirit
and the knowledge that we see
the suffering in our midst and
do not turn away, but lean down
to care, touch, and help.

AMEN!