



ST. PATRICK'S ANGLICAN CHURCH

4797 Curtis Blvd. Port St John FL 32927

The First Sunday in Trinity Season June 6, 2021

The passage selected for the sermon this morning is taken from the Gospel:

“there was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day, and there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores, and desiring to be fed with crumbs which fell from the rich man’s table.”

This parable is one of the most regularly hijacked and misused passages in the Bible. Every social welfare movement or liberation theology adopts Lazarus as its standard bearer and converts this parable into political capital. The goal is to draft Jesus into their movement, and retroactively imply His support for a social/political agenda. But this Gospel has nothing to do with anyone’s political or social beliefs or agenda.

In fact, it is only peripherally related to selfishness and greed, at least as we would understand it in relation to the rich man’s goods. If Jesus was a moral teacher like Buddha or Confucius, we could interpret the parable with that level of simplicity. But Jesus is God. His concern is not just our management of our wealth or our relationships with the poor. His concern is for the repair of the breach between God and man. His concern is for our mystical experience of the Trinity and our transcendence through the difficulties of this world to the eternal and ecstatic joy of the one to come.

The parable is delivered to the Pharisees who have attacked His claims to be the Messiah, but also to the disciples and Apostles. The Pharisees were well off, but they weren’t the 10%. They were those whose wealth gave them the time to study and to dedicate their lives to their faith and to the Temple. They had insight the average person did not have, and they were the witnesses to the sacrificial worship that was exclusive to the

Temple. They had some financial privilege, but their real wealth was their ability to participate in the sacramental expression of the Old Covenant fully and completely. They were the insiders of the Jewish faith.

The rebuke to the Pharisees in the parable is that in opposing Jesus as the Messiah, they were denying the fullness of the Covenant to the outsiders, the people who were not as well learned and whose circumstances didn’t give them the leisure of participating in the Old Covenant sacraments every week. In the parable, Jesus is also looking ahead to the lessons His own Apostles would have to learn, and to the lessons we ourselves also have to learn.

The central images of the parable are sacramental. The wealth that is denied Lazarus is represented as the crumbs from the rich man’s table. It is easy to see the connection between the crumbs of this parable and crumbs that the woman whose daughter was afflicted by a devil begged to receive. The Apostles tried to shoo her away and deny her access to Jesus, just as surely as the Pharisees shut out the disciples from the Temple worship.

The central image of the after-life is also sacramental. The rich man, in his torment, begs to have Lazarus bring him water so he can be quenched from his suffering. We easily can see the water that he desires as the water of Baptism. In this life, the Pharisees denied and questioned the Baptism of John. In denying Jesus as the Messiah, they took the same stance against the comfort of the Holy Spirit that the Messiah promised to send as the earnest of His love in the greater Baptism in the Name of the Trinity.

As the parable concludes, it is too late for the rich man, and so he begged God to send Lazarus to warn his brothers so that they could escape the

same fate. When Jesus responded that if they refused to believe the prophets and the Scriptures, they would also fail to believe, even if one came to them from the dead. Of course, when Lazarus, the real person, the friend of Jesus, was raised from the dead, these same Pharisees that Jesus confronted fulfill His prophecy. Instead of being converted by the miracle of the resurrection of Lazarus, they redoubled their efforts to have Jesus killed. The Apostles didn't learn from Lazarus's resurrection either. When Jesus was offered up on the cross just weeks after Lazarus was raised, they forgot the lesson and hid in fear and despair. They should have been proclaiming the return of the Lord and His victory over death, but instead they became overwhelmed with their own worries and concerns, hiding themselves away instead of opening the doors of faith to those who had not yet believed.

Which brings us to the point of this parable as it pertains to us. The wealth of the rich man is mystical and sacramental. That wealth is our wealth. We are the ones who have been baptized. We are the ones who have access to the feast, not only to the crumbs, but the fullness of Christ's life in us through the Bread of the Eucharist. We are the ones who are witness to the Resurrection and who have been informed and transformed by the grace of the Holy Spirit.

What Jesus is telling us is that we will be judged by how we share our wealth, which is the sacraments and the Scriptures and the community that we have had the privilege to know. This knowledge transforms our understanding of the expectations of a Christian life. The Pharisees understood that accepting an outsider like Jesus as the Messiah would mean that they would no longer be the privileged guest at the banquet. They would become servers who would share the Covenant.

The Apostles, who denied the Phoenician, woman, because they were busy and important, had even more direct instruction. They would not only have to give up their aspirations of importance, they would be not just servers, but servants of God to His people. Most of us come to Church in times of brokenness and desperation. The Church receives us, ministers to us, and restores our faith. As we reach the fulness of that healing, we are called to share the bread on our table, the soothing waters of comfort, the power of knowing what waits for us beyond this life. We are to become evangelists.

That is never an easy transformation. We are afraid of the judgment of the world. We fear to be rejected by those who God has given us to convert and comfort. We worry that we won't live up to the expectations of being a good Christian example. All those concerns are real, but they can't be the obstacle to our sharing of the Good News, the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

In fact, if we can muster our courage and exercise our faith, there are gifts of grace and joy waiting for us that dwarf our fears. Sharing grace is not a zero-sum game. There isn't less for us when we share what we have. In fact, by giving out the grace that we have received, we multiply our blessings.

The people God gives us to evangelize aren't a continent away. They are the people in our lives, our neighbors, our friends, our colleagues, and our family. We see them living lives of selfishness, emptiness, fear, unhappiness and despair. We ache for them to share the peace we have been given. The only place they will find peace and fulfillment is to come with us to the place where we experienced it ourselves. Before we partake of our own banquet, we need to walk outside and check to see who is starving for peace and love and understanding at our gates.

It isn't easy to be an evangelist. It doesn't bring instant gratification. The Father of the Prodigal Son kept watch until his beloved Son hit rock bottom and was willing to come home. But what joy he had as he embraced the Son. St Monica prayed for decades for her wayward, drunkard and womanizing son, before he was finally converted. We know him as St Augustine, the great doctor of the Church and an evangelist himself. We all yearn for the peace and satisfaction she experienced.

We need to ask the Holy Spirit to give us the grace to persevere in our courage to continually invite those we love to join us, to withstand the hurt when they reject or condemn us for doing so, and to have the patience to allow the Holy Spirit to complete the work we dare to start. Let's not wait until it is so late for us that we beg to send Lazarus to reach out to those we love. Let's do the work ourselves, and let's start the work today.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen