

Lazarus Is Knocking – A Sermon On Luke 16:19-31

September 28 2025

Exclusive communities, membership dues, railroad tracks, border walls, the other side of town; it seems there is always a gate between the rich and the poor. And so it is in today's gospel ([Luke 16:19-31](#)).

On one side of the gate a rich man lives in splendor. He's well dressed in expensive clothes. He sits at his table and feasts every day. A poor man named Lazarus lays on the other side of the gate. He's dressed in sores and dog spit. He's hungry. He would gladly eat the scraps that fall from the table but the table is on the rich man's side of the gate.

For the year 2024 the government of Canada has defined poverty for a single individual in Ontario, one Lazarus, as an annual income of less than \$26652.

For our government that is the gate that separates the rich man from Lazarus. By that standard I am a rich man. What about you? Are you a rich man or a rich woman? And how do you feel about today's gospel and what happens to the rich man? It makes me a bit twitchy and anxious. And it should.

I think this story is supposed to make us twitchy and anxious but not for the reasons you might think. I don't think this gospel is about an arbitrary dollar amount that separates the rich from the poor. I don't think it means the poor go to heaven and the rich go to hell. I don't think it is about rewarding the poor and punishing the rich. And I don't think those of us who have an annual income of \$26 652 or more are destined for torment and the agony of flames simply because of our income.

If I'm wrong about that and it is as simple as a dollar amount, then the solution is clear. We just reduce our annual income to \$26 652. Anyone in favor of that? No? Me either. I don't think it's that simple. Besides, the world doesn't need more poverty. So no, today's gospel is not about what will happen to us after we die.

Now before you breathe a sigh of relief let me tell you what I think this gospel is about. Today's gospel is about how we live today. Jesus is telling us that how we live today has consequences for tomorrow, not just for ourselves but

for others too. Jesus is asking us, regardless of our income, to face the poverty in ourselves and the world.

Lazarus doesn't just represent poverty in the world, he also represents the rich man's impoverishment. I suspect that's one reason why we set gates between the rich and poor. We don't want to look in the eyes of Lazarus and see ourselves. If we did, if we ever truly saw impoverishment in the world and in ourselves, it would ask something of us.

Our choices matter. Our priorities set a direction for where we are headed. Our values and actions shape what is becoming of us. Isn't that what we see in the rich man in today's gospel?

Jesus is warning us that today's gates become tomorrow's chasms. At some point the gates we use to shut out parts of ourselves or exclude another become the chasm that confines and isolates us.

The chasm that now separates the rich man from Lazarus is not new. And it's not God's judgment or punishment of the rich man. It's always been there. It's a part of the rich man and a reflection of his impoverishment. The chasm is another version or manifestation of the gate that separated Lazarus from the rich man. The gate and the chasm are the same thing.

Look at all the ways we set gates between ourselves and others; between rich and poor, the powerful and the powerless, black and white, gay and straight, Muslim and Christian, immigrant and citizen, neighbor and enemy, or any other category you might add to this list. Those gates are not a condition of circumstances or categories. They are a condition of the human heart. The gate that becomes a chasm always exists within us before it exists between us. It is a symptom of our impoverishment.

Maybe the rich man isn't as well off as he dresses and eats or looks and acts. Maybe you and I aren't either. What if the rich man would have opened his gate to Lazarus? What if we did?

What if we open the gates of compassion and concern for others, generosity and sharing, healing and wholeness, forgiveness and reconciliation, justice

and peace, vulnerability and love? What would that take? And what would it mean for your life?

I suspect it would change the way we pray, how we care for one another, the depth of our relationships, the significance of our lives, and what we hope for the future.

Look at your life and world. What are the closed gates in your life today? What gates are separating you from yourself or another? What is impoverishing you today? It might be fear, anger, resentment, jealousy, indifference, guilt, grief, old wounds, loneliness, cynicism, prejudice, or a thousand other things.

What gates do you need to open today in order to experience true wealth and abundance, to discover your true identity and worth, to live with true meaning and significance? What gates does Pembroke, this parish, our country need to open?

Take a moment and listen. Listen deeply. Do you hear it?

Our gates are being rattled. Every day our gates are being rattled.

Lazarus is knocking, rattling your gate and my gate. Lazarus is knocking.

Did I tell you what the name Lazarus means? It means “God has helped.”