

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church

"The Rich Man and Lazarus"

Scripture: Luke 16:19-31, Psalm 41:1-3

Hymns: Praise to the Lord, the Almighty 321, I'm gonna live so God can use me 648, PRAISE: I desire Jesus 2011/Amazing Love 1982/Change my heart O God 1989, Lord of all power 626

March 26, 2017

Rev. Steve Filyk

When I lived in Vancouver

I encountered a lot of beggars.

There was this one man

who was frequently outside my neighborhood Starbucks.

He sat cross-legged on a piece of cardboard.

A begging-cup was placed in front of him.

Often you couldn't tell whether he was awake

Or whether he was sleeping.

Even when people gave him money.

His head remained bowed down.

This man was like a fixture at that Starbucks.

Come rain or shine he was planted by their door.

Over my years in Vancouver

I must have seen him

A hundred times.

I never gave him anything.

I rarely did anything for people like him.

And I did have my reasons.

I was never convinced that he was making good use
Of the cash he was given.

I was pretty sure those gifts were reinforcing unhealthy habits.

At the same I wasn't committed
To getting to know him
or helping him find a better solution.

The truth is I was often in a hurry.
I had other concerns and preoccupations.
Whether it was time or money,
I had donor fatigue.

PAUSE

On your local trips around Kamloops
You may not encounter many beggars.
[Although I recently saw one outside Chapters.]

But if you do any international travelling,
you'll be sure to meet some.

And if you watch TV or browse the newspaper
You'll encounter a whole variety of people who are poor:

There are the working poor.
People who are making minimum wage
In the service industry.

There are those children living under the poverty line.
Kids who show up for school
without a proper breakfast.

Some people are fleeing hardship:
spouses that are abusive,
Or lands that are warring.

Some of the poor are self-medicating with drugs:
Trying to forget the traumas of their past.

Most of us are aware of these people.
But few of us consider their problems, our concern.

PAUSE

In Luke chapter 16 Jesus has been talking to his disciples
about wealth and its dangers.

When the Pharisees hear his teaching,
They make fun of him,
for as the Gospel writer tell us
they are 'lovers of money'.

What you may not know
Is that the Pharisees believed that wealth
was a sign of God's favor
[there are Bible passages that support this].

But the implied corollary was that the poor
were 'receiving just what they deserved'.ⁱ

In Luke chapter 16 the Pharisees start making fun of Jesus
And his teaching about money.

He responds by sharing a well-known story,
That he reshapes for these critics.

Let me take time to retell it,
Updating it for our particular context.

PAUSE

There was a rich man.
He dressed well.
He ate well.
He lived well.

The suits he wore to work were stylish and tailored.
His casual dress sported all the right brands.
In the mornings he left his home on the top of the hill
In his sleek new Mercedes.

One day as he was heading out
he noticed an old man
picking through his garbage, his recyclables.

He pulled out his phone and recorded a voice memo:
“Tell Juan to lock up garbage till collection day.
Don’t want vagrants leaving a mess.”

Now in most of our eyes,
There's nothing particularly wrong with this picture.
There's nothing particularly wrong about enjoying
The fruit of our labours:
Having a nice ride or a spacious house.

Jesus tells us there was a rich man.
Not so different from us.
And that there was a poor man also.

The garbage picker was named Lazarus.
His name was ironic: Lazarus means 'God has helped'.
Well Lazarus was scrounging for food
Or anything with residual value that he could pawn.

He was old
And he wasn't particularly well
He was sporting stubborn sores
that refused to heal.

But he kept going to keep going.
And garbage days can be good days in Kamloops.
It's amazing what the rich folks throw out.

Well low and behold the two men died that very night.

Despite the low-fat diet, medical specialists, and personal trainer
The rich man collapsed in the middle of the symphony.
He dropped dead from a heart attack.

As for the poor man it might have been the old age,
Or the infections, or the outdoor living.
His body was found the next morning
By some dog-walkers in the park.

A great funeral was held for the rich man.
He work was honoured; people spoke of his legacy.

But no-one spoke for the poor man.
No prayers were said as the city workers
Scattered his ashes in the ground.

Two men.
Two lives.
Two deaths.

But this is not the end.
Jesus invites us to consider the afterlife.
To take a look at how God measures a life.

What we see is a surprising, even terrifying, reversal.
While the rich man had spent his life
in posh air-conditioned surroundings.

He's now lost all his comforts:
the thermostat has been turned up.

Even more surprising is the fact that Lazarus
has been lifted out of the dumpster.
He is surrounded by beautiful fountains.
And is enjoying a sumptuous garden feast.

It's a shocking reversal.

What do we make of it?

I mean what did the rich man do

To earn such a place of horror?

Sure he might have been a little callous

But he didn't do anything criminal.

I'm only speculating...

But he was probably a good father,

A good friend,

And a faithful spouse.

Well what did he do?

As the story goes

It was not what he did,

But what he didn't do!

It wasn't commissions, but glaring omissions,

That led to this terrible fate.

Writhing in pain

He sees another wealthy man—Abraham,

Standing across the great divide.

And so he calls out to him and begs him:

"Have mercy Abraham! Send someone over here quickly.

How about that man. I recognise him.

Yes, send the garbage-picker, Lazarus.

Tell him to bring a cup of cold water.
My tongue is on fire.”

With pity Abraham responds that this is not possible.
Their lives have been lived
And the die has been cast.

Lazarus is being rewarded for what he has endured.
And the rich man,
Well he has already received his reward.

Realising that there is no relief for himself
The rich man turns his thoughts to his family
He has five accomplished brothers
Who have just moved into an exclusive gated community.
And are ignoring the poor just as he did.

“Well if Lazarus can’t get over here
Then send him to my family.
Let him warn them, so they won’t join me
In this God-forsaken place.”

Abraham reminds him:
“But they have Moses and the prophets.
All the warnings of the Scriptures.”

The rich man pleads:
“Come on Abraham, no one pays attention to the Bible.
Send Lazarus—a miracle will grab their attention.”

Abraham sighs.

“If they won’t listen to Scripture
They won’t pay attention to any miracle—
Even someone rising from the dead.”ⁱⁱ

I already mentioned that for Jesus’ listeners
This was a familiar story.

But this last section
is where Jesus departs from the usual retelling.

“In the [familiar version],
when someone asks permission
to send a message back
to the people who are still alive on earth,
the permission is granted.”ⁱⁱⁱ

But Jesus turns up the heat.
Jesus raises the stakes.

And he drives home his main point:
***‘They already have Moses and the prophets;
They should listen to them!’.***

They already have Moses and the prophets;
They should listen to them!

We also have Moses and the prophets.
But do WE listen to them?

Some of us fail to give the poor much attention
Because we consider ourselves in their number.

I mean if you live in a nice neighborhood
The fact that the family next door has bought a new BMW
While you are driving a Honda,
Well it can make you feel sorta poor.

If your neighbors take their kids to Thailand
While you spend Spring Break in Quesnel,
You may feel kinda poor by comparison.

But the reality is that when you consider all the people in the world
We have won the global lottery.
We are the wealthy of the world!

Don't believe me?

In some of my research I stumbled across a website
Hosted by the international humanitarian agency,
CARE international: globalrichlist.com.

On this website you are invited to type in your income
or your wealth (in case you are retired)
And it will instantly compare you
with the rest of the world.

For example if you make \$50k a year [that's my stipend]
You're in the top 0.62% richest people in the world by income.

In 1 hour you make \$26.04,
While the average labourer in Ghana
makes just \$0.11 in the same time.

Your monthly income could pay the monthly salaries
of 145 doctors in Kazakhstan.

OR lets say you have \$400k invested in your home
And another \$400k in savings.

You're in the top 0.12%
richest people in the world.

1% of your wealth could feed a family of four in Somalia for 47 years.
Your personal wealth is equal
to the combined wealth of 6,940 people in Liberia.

Your wealth could pay for 614,337
Long Lasting Insecticidal Nets in Malawi.
Each net protects a child from Malaria
and other potentially fatal diseases for 4/5 years.^{iv}

As one bank advises us, 'You are richer than you think!'

But what do we do with all this wealth,
All of our riches?

Have you tallied up your charitable receipts for the CRA?

According to a 2015 report produced by Statistics Canada,
The poorest segment of Canadian donors
(the people who actually give)
give away 2.1% of their entire household income.

This average drops dramatically as the wealth of the donors increases.
The top segment of Canadian donors giving away only 0.4%
Of their entire household income.^v

Interesting figures, aren't they?

They challenge those of us
Who convince ourselves that we are poor.
We are not.

And they challenge those of us
Who are satisfied with our charitable gifts and donations.
The truth is we only give away a small proportion
Of what God has given us to manage.

And so we too are confronted
with the call of law and the prophets.
[Here are some memorable words from Isaiah].

"Is not this the fast that I choose:
to loose the bonds of injustice,
to undo the thongs of the yoke,
to let the oppressed go free,
and to break every yoke?

Is it not to share your bread with the hungry,
 and bring the homeless poor into your house;
 when you see the naked, to cover them,
 and not to hide yourself from your own kin?"^{vi}

And we are left with the testimony of the one
 Who came back from the dead
 To call us to faithful obedience.

Who says "to those at his right hand,
 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father,
 inherit the kingdom prepared for you...

for 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,
 I was naked and you gave me clothing,
 I was sick and you took care of me,
 I was in prison and you visited me."^{vii}

Our church these days is fixated on sexual politics.
 I often wonder if this focus on other people's sins
 Is a distraction from the obedience to which we are called,
 With regard to our wealth.

I wonder if the condemnation our nation
 And our generation will receive
 Will be for our failure to notice the poor.

I challenge you to go home today,
 To look at your budgets
 And determine an amount you will devote to the poor.

Then take some time
 To think of your neighborhood.
 Ask God to show you which individuals or agencies
 God is calling you to support.

Then support them.
 Make a gift.
 Make a donation.
 Offer your time and expertise.

Fundraising posters often remind us:
 “You could save a life”
 The truth of the matter is that
 You could also save a soul”.

Amen.

ⁱ See Fred. B. Craddock *Luke* 192

ⁱⁱ revised retelling of this story written for August 30, 2009 sermon “The Rich Man and Lazarus”

ⁱⁱⁱ N.T. Wright *Luke for Everyone* 200

^{iv} see <http://www.globalrichlist.com/>

^v “Charitable Givings by Individuals” *Statistics Canada* December 6, 2015 p9 www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-652-x/89-652-x2015008-eng.pdf

^{vi} Isaiah 58:6-7

^{vii} Matthew 25:34-36