

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church
 The Rich Man and Lazarus
 Who are you failing to see?
 Scripture: Luke 16:19-31
 Rev. Steve Filyk
 March 14, 2021
 Opening Hymn: #349 My hope is built on nothing less
 Closing Hymn: #451 Dear Father, Lord of humankind (1,2,3)
 Choruses: Give thanks, Open the eyes of my heart

More envelopes are filing up our mailboxes
 And we see the new season arriving:
 Tax season.

It is the time of the year
 When we look at the numbers:
 What we made/lost from our investments,
 What we earned as a salary.

It is the time of the year
 When we look at all the numbers:
 our household income,
 our charitable donations,
 The amount we owe to the government,
 Or the government owes to us.

I ran across an article
 reporting that Canadians aren't donating like they used to.
 In 2017 the average Canadian only gave 0.54 of their income.

If you are an average Canadian,
 You shared one half of one percent of your income.

And our neighbors to the south?
 Those same people we often claim
 To be better than, gave nearly three times as much.

"Vancouver's Union Gospel Mission spokesperson
 Jeremy Hunka say while donations are falling,
 the need for help is going up.

[In his own words] "It's a scary thing because at the same time,
 the needs are escalating...
 people are struggling, and people are dying from things
 that would otherwise be preventable."ⁱ

In the Gospels, Jesus talks a lot about money
 And how we use it.
 Earlier in Luke chapter 16 he tells his disciples:
 "No one can serve two masters.
 Either you will hate the one and love the other,
 or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other.
 You cannot serve both God and money."ⁱⁱ

Luke tells us that when the Pharisees heard this,
 they rolled their eyes.
 You see there are verses in the Bible
 That connect wealth to faithfulness.

Many in Jesus' time saw
 Riches as a sign of God's blessing
 And poverty as a sign of some personal failure.

Many in Jesus' time felt that wealth
 Was a just reward and poverty a just punishment.

Some of us think this way today...

But Jesus sees this as a misreading of the Bible,
 Or at least an incomplete understanding of Scripture.
 And so to clarify, he tells us a story.

PAUSE

Today's parable is unique among Jesus' parable.
 It is "the only 'parable' of Jesus in which proper names occur..."

We meet Abraham.
 We meet Lazarus.
 And we meet an unnamed rich person.

In the first scene we are shown the very different lives
 lived by Lazarus and the rich man.

The rich man wears tailored clothes with designer labels.
 He is surrounded by the best of everything.
 Lazarus by comparison is clothed with sores and scabs.

Camped at the entrance of the rich man's gated neighborhood,
 Lazarus panhandles for a meagre existence.

His mouth waters when he watches
 The leftovers from the rich man's garden banquets
 Being tossed into garbage bags
 And then locked up in dumpsters.

If only he could find a way in...

Two very different lives:
 The life of the rich man,
 And the life of Lazarus.

"Despite the vivid contrast,
 [Jesus'] audience would not necessarily see the rich man as evil
 [nor] Lazarus as virtuous.

[As I already mentioned]

Abundant possessions [were understood to be] a gift from God,
and the condition of Lazarus, like the pitiable state of Job,
could [easily] be interpreted as a sign of disfavour.”ⁱⁱⁱ

But this is only the first part of the story.

Jesus continues.

Jesus tells us that both men die.

And that after their deaths there is a reversal of fates:

“in contrast to sumptuous feasting,
[the rich man is now] in great thirst;
in contrast to splendid garb,
he is [now] surrounded by flames.

As Lazarus “desired” to eat the scraps from his table,
[the rich man] now begs Abraham
to have Lazarus offer him a drop of water.”^{iv}

While the rich man begs for help,

Abraham explains that nothing can be done.

When the rich man asks to send an urgent message to his relatives

Abraham argues that their Bibles
provide adequate warning.

This is quite the story.

So why does Jesus tell it? PAUSE

Jesus tells the story to cautions us

against regarding our wealth

as a sign of God’s unconditional favour.

Jesus tells the story to warn us

That wealth can be harmful.

Money has this tendency

To make us self-centered,

And short-sighted.

When the day arrives when we are called to make an account of our living

“it will not be enough to say that we just did not pay attention,

or that we had intended to help out tomorrow...

Nor will it be enough to say that we lacked information

about our obligations...”^v

So does this mean we are all doomed?

We live in a nation that celebrated each year

As one of the best nations to live in.

Among those privileged to reside within Canada's borders,
 We are blessed with abundant opportunity, and resources.
 We are rich people.
 So are we doomed like the rich man of Jesus' story?

Not necessarily.
 Those who pay attention to the story
 Will realise that it contains two rich people
 Who face two different outcomes.

Alongside the 'rich man', Father Abraham was exceedingly wealthy.

All to say that "Wealth in itself
 does not exclude one from paradise...
 rather one's disposition toward God and neighbor
 and one's use of wealth are key.^{vi} PAUSE

We are moving into tax season.
 So what does your return say about
 Your disposition to God and your neighbor?

Is line 34900 (the sum total of your charitable donations)
 just a tiny portion of your income?
 Comparable to the crumbs that fell
 from the rich man's table?

Maybe now is the time to look away from your own needs
 And consider the needs in your own neighborhood.

We don't need to become that unnamed rich person of Jesus' parable.
 We can also be like Abraham who was known for hospitality
 For generosity,
 and for following God's will no matter the cost.

So will you be receiving back
 Some money from the government?
 I wonder if you might consider making a tithe of that check or transfer
 And give it not to the church,
 but to a local charity.

Here is one local charity,
 One that tragically lost its young founder,
 But will continue to do transformative work
 Right here in Kamloops. SHOW VIDEO

Generosity isn't commanded just because it is good for others.
 Generosity is good for our own souls.

ⁱ Robyn Crawford "Canadians are giving less to charity than they have in nearly 20 years: study" December 19, 2019 <https://globalnews.ca/news/6320620/canada-charitable-giving-study/>

ⁱⁱ Luke 16:13 NIV

ⁱⁱⁱ John R. Donahue *The Gospel in Parable* 170.

^{iv} Ibid 171

^v Marguerite Shuster *The Lectionary Commentary: the Gospels and Acts* "Luke 16:19-31" 421

^{vi} Ibid 421