9-28-2025 Sermon

In Plain Sight

In today’s Gospel reading, Jesus told a parable, not only about money or the afterlife, but also about seeing the humanity of our neighbor.  The story was of a rich man and a poor man. We don’t know the rich man’s name, but we know that he wore fine clothing and ate extravagant meals every day, while the poor man, (whose name we are told is Lazarus), lay at the gate of the rich man’s home every day.

He saw, heard and smelled those extravagant meals, yearning to have even the scraps. But he received no comfort unless he considered the street dogs who licked his wounds to be a comfort.

Lazarus was invisible in plain sight.  He was in the same spot, doing the same thing every day and he simply turned into a part of the landscape.  It’s a sad story, but all too relatable.

Do you think it’s possible for this to happen even today? Sure it is.  Society is full of marginalized people seeking or needing help but unable to find it or afford it.

In the parable, the rich man ignored Lazarus in his great need, and over time, both men died. The rich man was in torment in Hades, and Lazarus, as we heard, sat in the lap of Abraham. The rich man cried out to Abraham for help. (Notice he is still not speaking a word to Lazarus), and he called out as if he were still in a position of privilege.  Then, he used the term “Father” to make a connection to Abraham, trying to convince him that he deserved his pity.

The nameless rich man was still so self-absorbed that he asked Abraham to tell Lazarus to serve him and bring him comfort. Come on! His arrogance is almost too much to handle.

The rich man’s sense of entitlement was in the way of him recognizing why he was in so much pain. You ALMOST feel sorry for him as his inability to see the value of others had grown in a way that not only harmed others, but also restricted him from the very grace that would have alleviated his suffering.

This is the chasm that Jesus was talking about in his story. Abraham said that those who wish to cross from here to there cannot do so.

The issue Jesus was describing wasn’t an issue of wealth vs. poverty. It was the issue of the rich man refusing to see the humanity in Lazarus which created an uncrossable divide between the two.

The more we ignore our neighbors in need and don’t reach out to support them, the more we remove ourselves from experiencing divine grace.  The rich man, in his agony, wanted to warn his five brothers to change their ways so that they could be saved. But, again, he was missing the point. Rather than reaching out to all people as part of the family of God, the rich man couldn’t see beyond the needs of his immediate family.

So, Abraham reminded him that they have all of the prophets, Moses and the Scriptures. Everything they needed for salvation was already available to them.

Where does that leave us, friends? As we gather here, I see in this parable a message of good news for us through Abraham’s words to the rich man.  Among all of us gathered here, we have the wisdom found as followers of Jesus Christ. The authority of divine love points us to right relationship with our neighbors, and with the Lazaruses of the world.

In this story of Lazarus, the rich man, his five brothers and Abraham, in which characters would you say we are represented?  I feel that in a way, we are represented by all of them! Allow me to explain…

As the church, we are in a way like Abraham, offering guidance and opportunities for people to enter into a right relationship with God.  That’s great!

We are also a little like the rich man, as we certainly could be doing more to reach out to and serve those who struggle to be seen.  Especially those who seek God but are afraid that they won’t be accepted.

Luckily, we also are represented by the brothers of the rich man who are given another chance to turn things around and make things right.

And finally, we are also unfortunately represented by Lazarus.  Invisible in plain sight as we too have turned into a part of the landscape.  Allow me to explain:

I recently discovered that our church is in plain sight yet invisible just as Lazarus was as he begged at the gate of the rich man. About a month ago, I met a Waupun resident who asked me where the church that I serve was. When I told them we are right across the street from the Library and Werner-Harmsen Funeral Home, they were confused and asked, “You mean where the Wesley Center is? I didn’t realize there was a church there.” :^ (  Wow… that’s painful.

I find their statement as rather a wake-up call and I wonder if we asked members of the community what they think of the United Methodist Church in town, we might get similar responses:

* Which one is that?
* Where is that one located?

Or, we might just get a response of:

* Is that the one with the Craft Fair in the Fall?

We have a lot to offer our community and yet I can’t help but feel akin to Lazarus who sits at the gate of the rich man, yearning for scraps.  I never thought of the church as marginalized before, but maybe we are...

However, that shouldn’t be the position of the church.  We should be the center of community focus.  We should be transforming hearts and minds and souls, and we aren’t going to do that by becoming a part of the landscape.

In our situation, the more we become a part of the landscape, the more we are represented by the rich man who paid no attention to the needs of his neighbors.  So instead, let’s look for ways that we can become more active in our community. Can we host a community group, exercise class or service project as a congregation?  Because showing our neighbors that we not only enjoy being with each other, but also want to include them in our lives is what will make us more visible.

Let’s give it some serious thought, because being invisible in plain sight is a terrible position to be in.  Especially when we are the hands and feet of Christ.  Amen.