

Let us pray,

Lord, teach us to serve, rather than expect to be served.

Amen.

FINALLY!!

We finally have a text that is preachable.

Which means its a great time for me to talk about something I saw on social media!

I stumbled upon this pastor from California.

His name is Brian Drinkware, you might have seen his post actually.

And he said something that really resonated with me, and in fact works quite well with our Gospel passage today.

He was reminding American Christians about what it means to be followers of Jesus.

And towards the end of his post he said this:

“Remember that you don’t fight for victory - you live from it.

Jesus already sits on the throne. The question isn’t whether He will reign. The question is whether you will live as though He does.

Because here is the truth: Jesus is both Lion and Lamb. But He wins not by roaring louder than His enemies, but by laying down His life for them. Empire celebrates strength. The kingdom celebrates sacrifice.”

“Empire celebrates strength. The kingdom celebrates sacrifice.”

Today’s Gospel gives us an example of this reality.

The rich man thought that he was better than the poor man.

Partially because he had more money, but also because he thought that he had it made in heaven too because of who his family is associated with.

Father Abraham.

The rich man thought that his wealth and his familial ties gave him strength, and therefore had no need to care for anyone else.

Because he had that golden ticket to prosperity in this life and the next.

But eventually he dies, and he finds out that he does not have the golden ticket.

Quite the opposite, he ends up going to Hades and finds out that the poor man Lazarus is in heaven instead of him!

But here is the best part, the first thing the rich man asks for isn't to be in heaven with Abraham, but for the poor man Lazarus to serve him in Hades.

Even in Hades, the rich man still thinks that he is better than Lazarus who is in heaven.

The rich man has yet to learn the lesson.

God does not desire for us to be better or stronger or wealthier than other people.

God does not rejoice in our excess.

God rejoices in our humility.

The world pats us on the back for our accomplishments, but God pats us on the back for our ability to love one another.

We must fight the desire to use religion to promote strength and power and prestige instead of what it really is meant to promote, which is humility, sanctification, love, peace and forgiveness.

People throughout history have used religion to justify all types of evil and power grabs.

We even see it in the Bible, especially in the old testament, with Solomon, David, and a bunch of other kings.

But every time, God sends a prophet, to remind God's people that strength is not the mark of a true follower of God.

Humility, love, mercy, care for the poor and marginalized, empathy and compassion are marks of a true follower of God.

Which is why we see Jesus in this parable giving us that same warning again.

A warning that often times, goes unheard, unfortunately.

Because the reality is, the temptation to choose our own success over the success of God's kingdom, is a very very strong temptation.

When it comes to Jesus, it is very clear, that to be a follower of him, means to go where the world doesn't want to go.

To use our talents not for our own gain, but the benefit of all people and the glory of God.

To care for those that the world doesn't wish to care for.

To love those who hate us and those that we hate.

To almost be the exact opposite of what the world is telling us to be.

Because remember:

“Empire celebrates strength. The Kingdom celebrates sacrifice.”

The Gospel reminds us, that just because we invoke the name of Jesus or Abraham, does not make us followers of them.

That just because we think that we are owed something because of our status, our belief, our family ties, our wealth, does not mean that God feels the same way.

As someone who truly believes that in the end, all people will be saved.

Because I truly believe in the abundance of God's grace.

And I do not think this Gospel is meant to be a warning for eternal damnation.

I do, however, see this parable as a warning for us on how we are called to live today as disciples.

Jesus is warning those who think that they are somehow divinely gifted because of their self defined salvation status, earthly comforts and power over others, that they may wish to think differently about that.

That if their goal truly is to be following the ways of the Lord.

They need to stop being so concerned about separating themselves from others, and be more concerned about reaching out to others.

And most importantly, not so that those reaching out can be served, but rather that those reaching out may serve.

Especially reaching out to serve those at the fringes of society.

The Lutheran Church, mainline churches and the Roman Catholic Church, and probably some others, have this understanding of God that we all share.

It is one of the things that the vast majority of christian denominations agree on, at least in their official doctrines.

It is this idea that God has a preferential option for those on the margins of society.

That doesn't mean that God doesn't care about those in the majority, or those who have life essentials and/or luxuries.

But God's main gaze is towards those who do not have things or their needs met on earth.

Whether that be a lack of wealth, status, housing, relationships, family, health, etc.

God's light shines brightest in the places that the world's darkness is heaviest.

And this isn't meant to be that God cares about certain people more than others, because one person could experience wealth and poverty in a lifetime.

It's not about the person, it's about the experience of that person.

So when we hear this parable from Jesus, he is using individuals as examples, to prove a point, but it isn't meant to necessarily say that you can only be rich and you can only be poor.

Humans are complex.

So the warning is for all of us.

If we ever get to a point where we don't think that we need to be saved, or that we feel like we deserve to be served and don't also have to serve others.

Be warned, we are not heading in the right direction, repent and turn back.

Religion when done right, frees, liberates, mutually serves, and shares love and forgiveness.

Religion when done right compels us to help those who need help.

To serve those on the margins, no matter who they may be.

Not because its fair, but because it is what our God, our King, our Savior, is calling us to do.

Let us not be like the rich man and instead listen and hear the words of the prophets before we die.

Let us hear their call to serve the poor, the marginalized, the outcast, and most importantly go looking for them.

Be the light of God that God is calling us to be for them.

Because in our baptism, we are called into the sacrifice of awareness and service.

Because we are called to live differently than the human Empire.

WE are called to live like Jesus did, to serve the kingdom not of this world, but of the world eternal.

Amen.