**Luke 16:19-31**

**September 28th 2025**

**Pray**

Take a guess, how long is the world’s longest bridge? How many miles do you think it runs? Any idea? Would you believe the Danyang-Kunshan bridge, located in China, built to withstand Earthquakes and typhoons stretches for 102.4 miles. The longest bridge in America is Lake Pontchartrain Bridge and stretches 23.79 miles and locally our longest is the Peace bridge at just over a mile. No matter if the bridge is passing over the Niagara River or countless lakes and rivers in China, I am not sure any bridged gap in our world is as large as the chasm mentioned in our Gospel reading.

The story told by Jesus likely is not a historical occurrence but a parable or teaching story used stir up reflection, wonder, and questions in the listener. Jesus has been teaching on managing wealth and resources. Encouraging the disciples to value people over money, and to keep Love of God and neighbor as our guiding compass. When he offers a tale that might seem more appropriate for Halloween than church. This story may teach and intimidate us but make no question it is filled with chasms.

The scene is set with a rich man who feasts, while wearing Prada, Louis Vuitton, and maybe some brand new Nike’s. While at his gate, or foot of the steps in this 19th century painting, a Lazarus hungry and covered not in purple cloth but in sores with only dogs giving him any mercy. Their wealth disparity is a gap. Their health is a divide. Most of all the Richman’s inability to notice or see a man in need at his door step is a canyon that is never bridged. Both meet the fate that awaits us all, death. Here again I emphasis this is a teaching story about wealth, discipleship, and faithfulness. Jesus is not teaching on the realities of the next life; he is preparing us for living abundant life here and now.

The rich man ends up in hades, the Greek underworld and now he lifts up his eyes. The rich man sees Abraham, and now he also notices Lazarus. Except their places have reversed, now the rich man is in agony and seeking mercy from Lazarus. Please Abraham, have Lazarus dip his finger in water to cool my tongue from these flames.

Abraham points out the chasm the gap between them. No one can cross from one side to the other. The man begs then for his family to be spared. Abraham says the rich man’s family has access to the Moses and the Prophets. These he says are some pretty great teachers and if they haven’t listened, nothing will convince them. Not even if someone comes back from the dead. We call that foreshadowing but we can name the doubt or inability of the rich man’s family to believe or follow the teachings another chasm.

There is no shortage of divisions, barriers, and chasms in our world between people. Some we share with the story; income inequality, access to food and healthcare, and at the stories heart concern for oneself over and above the needs of neighbor. Yet, in our world we could also name the divides around politics, values, and sometimes it feels, basic humanity. To our broken world is Jesus saying, “give what you have or else?” I don’t believe so. Instead, this story may be an invitation to live differently, to be Angels or perhaps even bridge builders.

Several years ago, my wife and I were Graduate students in Southern California. Unable to afford the time or money to fly home for Thanksgiving we drove up for a quick trip to San Francisco. On Thanksgiving Day we went for a walk on the Golden Gate Bridge, which spans 1.7 miles for those that are curious. As we walked with thousands of others that day, I became aware that the striking international Orange suspension bridge we were on, was not the most important or beautiful bridge present that day. For as we walked, we began to notice, to see the Angels. The bridge watch Angels. From their website, “The Bridgewatch Angels dedicate their holidays to saving lives on the Golden Gate Bridge. We greet everyone we meet with smiles and well wishes. Our mission is to engage individuals on the bridge who are walking alone, displaying negative body posture, or lingering mid-span. The Bridgewatch Angels offer support for those individuals by listening and sharing words of life and hope.”

Angels spending their holiday away from the comfort of their own homes or their own feasts, to reach out to folks hurting and suffering. Where the rich man never looked up to see those in need, Bridge angles keep eyes and hearts open. The Bridge Angels ceased operations in 2024 because a net was finally installed the length of the Golden Gate Bridge. Its mere presence a deterrent that saves lives. The nets could be viewed as a way we as society have declared we will prioritize caring for one another with the resources God has given us.

In our Gospel story the Angels carried Lazarus. What if we viewed our role church to be Angels, Bridge Angels. Messengers of the Good News of Jesus but ones who also bring mercy, who have eyes and hearts open to our neighbors in need.

How might you be an Angel to someone? How might we need to do church differently to take this mission seriously?

“For there is one God and one mediator between God and Humankind, Christ Jesus, himself human.” 1 Timothy 2:5 NRSVUE

The Good News is that Jesus is the ultimate bridge builder. Jesus presence and purpose forever bridged the divide between the divine and humanity. Through his life, crucifixion, and resurrection Jesus ensured that evil, sin, and even death would never separate us from the love of God. In our joys, in our struggles, in those moments where we wonder if anything we do really matters, we can be confident in the presence, grace, and mercy of God in Christ. We are an Easter people who give thanks that there is no river, lake, or chasm that is too wide to be bridged by Jesus. Amen.