

Grace and peace to you this day!

Intro to Gospel Reading

Today our gospel reading is from chapter 16 of the gospel according to Luke, where Jesus comments on the Economics of Kingdom living. A consistent thread throughout the Gospel of Luke are teachings about money and justice and compassion.

May God speak to your heart this morning through scripture and this reflection.

Luke 16:19-31

¹⁹ "There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. ²⁰ And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, ²¹ who longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man's table; even the dogs would come and lick his sores. ²² The poor man died and was carried away by the angels to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried.

²³ In Hades, where [the rich man] was being tormented, he looked up and saw Abraham far away with Lazarus by his side. ²⁴ He called out, "Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am in agony in these flames." ²⁵ But Abraham said, "Child, remember that during your lifetime you received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in agony. ²⁶ Besides all this, between you and us a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who might want to pass from here to you cannot do so, and no one can cross from there to us." ²⁷ He said, "Then, father, I beg you to send him to my father's house— ²⁸ for I have five brothers—that he may warn them, so that they will not also come into this place of torment." ²⁹ Abraham replied, "They have Moses and the prophets; they should listen to them." ³⁰ He said, "No, father Abraham; but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent."

³¹ He said to him, "If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced *even if someone rises from the dead.*" "

The Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

Sermon

You've probably heard the phrase it's as easy as riding a bike. It's used as a way to encourage someone taking on a new challenge. About eight years ago, John and I learned that bike riding is not always easy. Without much forethought, we decided to take a bike trip out to Napa Valley. Never being on a bike adventure before I booked the trip three weeks before the departure date — because *it sounded fun*.

We thought we were in pretty good shape, so training for the trip didn't cross our minds. Our newfound adventure was scheduled to start on a Sunday, but because I am usually at church on Sundays, we arranged to meet the tour at noon on Monday. Let me

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mention — we got up at four a.m. east coast time - to catch a 6:00 am flight to make it to the west coast in time to meet the group (of about a dozen folks) at noon. We rendezvoused with the rest of the group who had spent the morning biking to a winery for a tasting and lunch.

Not realizing what was ahead of us, we ALSO partook of the tasting, which included a number of different wine varietals. Then we had lunch. And because John and I didn't know anyone, we decided to get a head start on our **22-mile bike ride** to the hotel that evening. I can't speak for John, but I was just a little buzzed from the wine.

The guide said, "If at any time you want to stop, we can give you a bump" — meaning they would pick us up and drive us the rest of the way. "Who needs a Bump?!" - we laughed. If you have ever been to Napa Valley, you know the roads are hilly and winding. The hills are picturesque - when you are doing downhill...in a car. Friends, it wasn't all downhill and in our slightly altered state, we soon found the terrain be like a roller coaster — in which we had to provide the power! And then —the weather changed on us. It went from an overcast day — to wet, slick roads with barely a shoulder to bike on, low visibility AND traffic. It felt like Hell. We were dead tired when we arrived at the hotel. We missed dinner (which was included in our trip) and we found out the next day that NO ONE else biked that leg of the trip.

The point of the story is that the High Way — is NOT always the easy way - especially if you are burdened. Some burdens we bring on ourselves...and some are out of our control. Isn't that how it goes in life?

Friends, what our world is facing now, in this pandemic, feels much like biking uphill in uncharted territory. We are trying to prepare for something we know very little about.

Someone once said, "When they go low...we go high." And it sounds so noble. Yet, going high is hard, hard work. Going high often means traveling in uncharted territory. Going high almost always has economic implications.

I once heard a radio interview with Jane Mayer, the author of the book titled *Dark Money*. *Dark Money* is about how large sums of hidden money has influenced our political process. Featured in her book is a story about a billionaire who has donated over 77 million dollars to presidential campaigns in recent years. Mayer reports that this billionaire believes that one's worth as a human being has a price tag — which is of course, is commensurate with your financial status. Mayer gave the example that a teacher is worth two hundred times less than a billionaire and someone on welfare has a negative worth in the eyes of this individual.

While that is an extreme, blatant, and dangerous example — it exemplifies the deep chasm we face in the world today. And, if we search deep, deep inside, we may find latent vestiges of that mindset in our personal conditioning.

Putting a price tag on human lives is risky at any time but especially so during a pandemic crisis. Just this week, someone said to me, “We are killing our economy over THIS?! It’s not as bad as the smallpox epidemic.”

Jesus tells a parable that would have been familiar to those who heard it. Many ancient satires of his time were targeting displays of *conspicuous* wealth. And so, the parable’s focus is not having wealth — but what do you do with it. Do you flaunt it? Or, do you use it to make the world a better place?

For a current illustration of the parable copy and paste this report into your favorite browser: https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/14/technology/coronavirus-purell-wipes-amazon-sellers.html?smid=fb-share&fbclid=IwAR2-9QWqfhNdcllrXBF4bsvFwzZi2ByUOudjRf9VGFGrywuZAC16Gs_PVug

Think about it...There was a rich man who was dressed in the color of royalty - purple and fine linen...and he feasted sumptuously every day. Right outside his gated home was a poor man covered in sores. Purple sores that the dogs would lick. Jesus highlights the chasm of his society, the self-indulgent compared to the desperately poor. It’s worthy to note: Self-indulgence is a very effective marketing tool these days.

“Ironic, isn’t it, that in this story the rich man is nameless, and the poor man named? In real life, things mostly happen in the opposite way; the street people are faceless and those who starve daily nameless, but the wealthy have their faces all over the media and their names on buildings.”

Namelessness keeps the desperate at a distant.

But, we are told the Rich man **did know** the Lazarus’ name. The Rich man calls out to Father Abraham and names saying — “send Lazarus down...to serve him”

The Rich man knew very well who Lazarus was. He’d walked around him every day on his way to the office. He knew who Lazarus was — but he didn’t **know** Lazarus.

He’d never really looked Lazarus in the eye - the window into his soul. And so, in death, Luke tells us that the Rich man has a window into paradise from his room in the Hades hotel. The Rich man is separated from God in death. There is no greater Hell than being separated from God in life or in death. What would have saved the Rich Man from this doom?

Jesus has a few training tips for us when traveling The High Way:

Recognize people as people. Really see them — as someone’s darling child, who was once loved, or should have been. Jesus said that in the hospitality of life: When you give a banquet, don’t invite your friends . . . invite the poor.”

Friends, in the coming weeks, as this crisis we are living in intensifies, there will be opportunities to put your trust in God and risk — risk reaching out to those who cannot fill their shelves with toilet paper and hand sanitizer. Those who don't have a food supply for two days, let alone two weeks. God will ask the faithful not to leave them behind. Don't walk around those who's worth in God's eyes is just as precious as our own. Keep them in prayer and share what you can in this time of crisis.

And— it is a two-way street. When Jesus commissions the disciples in Luke chapter ten, to go out two by two, Jesus tells the disciples to be ready to accept the first invitation — *not the best invitation*. Accept the first, even if it is from a poor person: “remain in that same house, eating and drinking whatever they provide . . . (10:7-8). Disciples will both host and be hosted by the poor, then there is no possibility of inequality in the reciprocity of human relationship.

Now my job as a disciple, just as yours is, is to afflict the comfortable and to comfort the afflicted. We will be called by God in various ways to trust and risk...to care for each other. Who knows what kingdom wonders might be exchanged?

Where is God inviting you to stretch in the hospitality of life?

Let us pray:

O Christ our Lord, as in times past, not all the sick and suffering found their way to your side, but had to have their hands taken, or their bodies carried, or their names mentioned. So, confident of your goodness, we bring our prayers for ourselves and others to you.

Christ Jesus, you traveled through towns and villages “curing every disease and illness.” At your command, the sick were made well. Come to our aid now, in the midst of the global spread of the coronavirus, that we may experience your healing love. Heal those who are sick with the virus. May they regain their strength and health through quality medical care. Heal us from our fear, which prevents nations from working together and neighbors from helping one another.

We name before you those whose problem is psychological; those haunted by the nightmares of their past or the specters of their future; those whose minds are shackled to neuroses, depression or fears, who do not know what is wrong or what to pray... Lord Jesus Christ, bring healing, bring peace.

We name before you those in whose experience light has turned to darkness, as the end of a life or the breaking of a relationship leaves them stunned in their souls and silent in their conversation, not knowing where to turn, to whom to turn, or whether life has a purpose anymore...

Lord Jesus Christ, bring healing, bring peace.

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And others whose troubles we do not know or whose names we would not say aloud,
we mention now in the silence which you understand...

Lord Jesus Christ, bring healing, bring peace.

On all who tend the sick, counsel the distressed, sit with the dying, or advance medical
research we ask your blessing...

We pray in the name of our Lord, your son, Jesus, Amen.