

In the Gospel, Jesus was on a tear! He was delivering parable after parable to the religious authorities concerning their use of money with both barrels, letting them have it! But what's this got to do with us, with our walk with God and with one another? That's what we're going to talk about this morning.

OPENING PRAYER

LUKE 16:19-31

Jesus said to them, "There was a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day.²⁰ And at his gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores,²¹ who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table. But the dogs came and licked his sores.²² The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried.²³ In Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side.²⁴ And he called out, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame.'²⁵ But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish.²⁶ And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us.'²⁷ And he said, 'Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father's house,²⁸ for I have five brothers, so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment.'²⁹ But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.'³⁰ And 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 hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.'"

The parable in this morning's Gospel is about two men—a rich man and Lazarus, a poor man: It's a simple story with a simple point: The one man is entirely self-sufficient and cares for nothing but himself to the point of extravagant feasting every day. And the other man is so poor he's entirely dependent on the mercy of other people; he eats nothing but what is given to him as charity.

Can you imagine being so fabulously wealthy that nothing matters to you? You could buy whatever makes you happy and buyoff whoever makes you sad! Of course we can imagine this. That's why there's this thing called the lottery!

Notice that Lazarus "**was laid**" at the gate of the rich man. He was so poor that he didn't even have the strength to go to that place where the money was? He was entirely dependent on forces over which he had no control.

This reminds me of the slums I've seen in developing countries. They sometimes stretch for acre after acre. And often, right alongside of the slums stand the mansions of the rich. Up and down the streets there may be a regular parade of children with bloated bellies in the arms of their destitute mothers, amputees and blind people begging, people entirely dependent on the mercy of their neighbors.

This kind of poverty may be difficult for us to imagine, for most Americans know where their next meal is coming from. But what about our next mortgage payment, or our retirement, or our unforeseen medical disaster? We're not without our own struggles.

I want for us to see ourselves in the shoes of the rich man and also the poor man, Lazarus. As the rich man you can live wherever you like and drive whatever suits you. You want a yacht? No problem! Got money to burn!

But this kind of thinking can change us, can't it? First, we buy lots of toys to test the theory that money can't buy me happiness; and then, second, we protect it; whatever it takes, we find ways to keep it even at the expense of my relationships with other people.

And that's the point of this teaching, our relationships, how we treat one another.

Did you notice only Lazarus is identified by name; the other man is simply "the rich man." "**Lazarus**" means "God helps."

Jesus said the greatest commandment is, "**love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind....** ³⁹**And a second is like it:**

You shall love your neighbor as yourself. ⁴⁰On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets" (Matthew 22:37-40).

Luther taught that we do not love God by coming to church. For we come to church to be loved by God, to be fed by his Word, to be lifted up and strengthened by his Holy Spirit. Rather the way that we love God is by obeying his command to love our neighbor. In other words, what could be a more loving thing to do for God than to obey what he has told us to do?

If I am the rich man, my responsibility is to discern the Lazarus God has given to me to care for, thus fulfilling his command to love my neighbor. Indeed, we don't build God's kingdom with bricks and mortar but with transformed hearts and acts of service in the name of Jesus.

On the other hand, let us be the poor man, Lazarus, for God helps us. The Lord answers our prayers; he provides for our every need. When I am angry, I pray, and the Lord gives me peace. When I am sad, I pray, and the Lord lifts up my spirits with a word of encouragement. And when I am lonely, I pray, and the Lord gives me fellowship with other people.

The author of Hebrews wrote, God said, **"I will never leave you nor forsake you."** **6So we can confidently say, "The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?" (Hebrews 13:5-6)**

Friends in Christ, are you struggling financially? Pray for relief, and the Lord will help you. Are you frustrated with your work? The Lord will help you if you will pray to him. Are you concerned about a relationship? The Lord fixes relationships by healing hearts through forgiveness.

Friends in Christ, let's think of ourselves as Lazarus this week, the one whom God helps. I am absolutely dependent on God's mercy through his son, Jesus. Aren't you too? This is not a popular message in the self-help churches. But if you're like me, and you look in the mirror daily and do a reality check, you know there is nowhere else to go.

With Lazarus I hold out my hands; there is no more struggle; and I say, "Into your hands, O Lord, I commend myself."

And this week let us be the rich man. We can do both. We can reflect on our poverty and give ourselves up entirely into the hands of God. But we can love the Lazarus the Lord has brought into our lives, sharing the gifts the Lord has shared with us.

And this week let us share this Good News with another person who really needs to hear it, in the name of Jesus. Amen.