

16th Sunday after Pentecost- Proper 21 (C)

Luke 16: 19-31

Sept 25, 2022

Christ Episcopal Church

Towanda, Pa.

Rev. Betsy W. Sentigar

Come Holy Spirit and fill us with the balm of your Holy Love. Amen

I don't often seek a title for a sermon, but today's title seems the call itself out to me. That title is "If Dogs could talk". We understand Lazarus is a most vulnerable and marginalized position in Luke's gospel - covered in sores and longing for relief. The man of wealth has a blind eye to his presence. This rich man is living a lavish and excessive life style. His garments are of royal purple.

As I was praying with this scripture this week with others, I began to imagine how it would feel like to be Lazarus, my discomfort, my hunger, my pain, my yearning. What's going on with the rich man, It is a willful ignoring of the man right at his gate? This passage refers to putting wealth in its place. Some Christians promote prosperity...but that security is fleeting. When we make more money we want more money... Paul did not prevent those with money into the church but said to be good in good works- be generous. Don't seek contentment at all but fight the good fight. Contentment is temporary. We need to be rich - in good works !¹

Amos is granting fair warning for excess and comfortable security in our Old Testament lesson. There will be a reckoning, a righting of wrongs. This is a wake up call. As Luke's gospel also instructs us, Abraham said". If they don't listen to Moses and the Prophets, then neither will they be persuaded if someone rises from the dead."

¹ Pulpit Fiction Podcast - Proper 21C - Sept 25, 2022

The naming of Lazarus is important. He is named by the rich man as a servant. The rich man doesn't really see him at first but then he sharply comes into focus as it occurs to him that Lazarus could be an asset to him., calling him servant of Abraham. This is the only time in the parables a name is given.

The deep crevasse now present between the two is most vividly accentuated in the tension. Its important not to set this up as a black and white - good/bad comparison, yet it **is** important to contrast the two and overlay our Christian values to gain perspective. Lazarus was not virtuous. So what made him good? Before the law, the wealthy man was committing no crime. Can we call this evil?

If the rich man's only crime is that he feasted daily while another was in such dire straits, then most of us are in trouble. However, If his crime I is that he didn't **do enough** to alleviate Lazarus's suffering, then maybe we have hope.

I see Jesus today in this gospel as the dog. The creature of compassion and unconditional love. How does this speak to us? How often do we not see or "chose" to not see the ones lying at the gate? With receiving nothing, I imagine the attention of the dog offers a soothing attention and consolation to Lazarus

I've been taken to studying the Christian mystics over many years. This week, one in particular speaks to me; Julian of Norwich. As I was contemplating Lazarus, I also thought of Jesus in the same position as he walked the way of the cross, as he fell. Julian had a consolation centered around Veronica's veil, described in the sixth station of the cross. As Jesus fell, Veronica "Sees" with a capital "S" and offered a cloth to sooth him. This is the only thing she has. It is very risky [in this heightening parade of terror,[but her love [and desire] become greater than her fear.

Jesus takes the veil and presses it against his face. This veil, this fabric she saw as the **fabric of our life**. There is a deeper, deeper, deeper place of God. ²

God loves us so much that his is moved in Christ be one with us, both in good times and in our suffering. Suffering should move us by the grace of God to reach out and relieve another's suffering. As we become more responsive to the hurts, hopes, and needs of others we become more acutely aware of our own humanity, of our own longings and insufficiency and thereby can appreciate God's offer of manifest grace in Christ, the one who took on our need, our humanity, our lot and our life, all in order to show us God's profound love for each and all of us.³

Christ brought a message of liberation from all forms of human oppression, specifically, social, economic, political, racial, sexual, environmental, and religious. In effect, [his message informing us] is not so much what is said in bearing witness to the good news of the resurrection, but rather, what is done to and with those still trapped by the social forces of death. ⁴

For eons we've had the good news of resurrection in Jesus Christ - as redeemer of the world. God loved the world so much, that he sent him to be incarnate, to be a force of love and compassion in the world - to show us the way of love. The Kingdom of God is all about community - a Way of Love. This parable charges us with again asking ourselves, how we can be a healing presence in a suffering world. How does the fabric of our life hold us in Christ?

² Turning to the Mystics with James Finlay - Center for Actions and Contemplation - Podcast Sept. 16, 2022

³ David Losey Dear Working Preacher - In God we Trust - Sept. 29, 2010

⁴ Dictionary of Scripture and Ethics- Joel B. Green pg. 484 - Baker Publishing Group

A prayer for new sight.
God of the ignored,
God of the invisible,
Whose Divine gaze rests on all alike,
Who sees what we cannot, or dare not see.
Who cares for those for whom we care not.
Who loves those whom we love not.
Open our eyes, unstop our ears, move our hearts, that we may with boldness and courage
see the face of the Divine in the mighty and the lowly, the exalted and the excluded; for the
honor of your holy name. Amen.

By Dean K. Johnson