



“Together We Do More: Wrestling with Ministry”

Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost
5:30 p.m. Saturday, September 24, 2016
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Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

1 Timothy 6:6-19; Luke 16:19-31

Grace to you and peace, from God who is, who was, and who is to come. Amen.

We heard the beginning of this section from our gospel last week, with the story of the manager who was going to be fired, so he changed the amounts owed to his boss in order to make certain he would be able to find a job once he was fired.

What we *didn't* hear was a short section between our lesson from last week and what we heard tonight, verses 14-18, And what I think specifically ties in with our lesson, and helps it more a bit more sense to us, are verses 14 & 15.

But before I talk about those verse, let me momentarily talk about something else, and that being, us. I don't mean “us” like when your significant other, spouse, dating partner, whomever says to you *Let's talk about us*. I mean “us” as in human beings “us.”

Because this week, we have once again heard about police shootings. Those shootings are tragic. They *appear* to be somewhat motivated, or triggered, due to the skin color of the shooting victim (and by that I mean we haven't heard about police shooting any non-dark skinned person). And many of us, myself included, formed our opinions about the events fairly quickly, for good or for bad.

As one of our members said to me just yesterday, there are *good* police just as much as there are *bad* police. There are *good* folks who are economically disadvantaged just as much as there are *bad* folks who are economically. There are good pastors and bad pastors, good teachers and bad teachers, good car mechanics and bad car mechanics. And, in my biased opinion, skin color *in and of itself* really has **nothing** to do with a person being “good” or “bad.” Human beings in general are good or bad - or more accurately, somewhere along that spectrum.

But, because we're human beings, once we get started going toward one spectrum or another, it becomes more difficult to swing toward that other. And we tend to stick around those who are like us, those going on that same path, be it economically, religiously, politically, whatever. Human beings like to be around that and those with which we are familiar and which we feel comfortable. Just like one of the main characters in our gospel lesson tonight.

The rich man wanted to be around folks like himself. Or perhaps, better put, he did **not** want to be around folks like the homeless, diseased guy who lives at his front gate.

So our story for tonight: A rich man dies. And so does a fellow named Lazarus (This Lazarus is NOT the same Lazarus as in the fellow Jesus raises from the dead, brother of Mary & Martha). Still, two men die. Both end up in the place of the dead, although Lazarus is with Abraham (yes, *The Abraham*) in a place of peace, while this rich guy ends up in Hades, a place of torment.

The rich guy, feeling the torment, and seeing - and more importantly **recognizing** - Lazarus, goes through a series of negotiations with Abraham in order to attempt to gain some relief.

Now let's back up for a moment. What do we know about Lazarus? We know his name: Lazarus. We know he is poor. We know he is diseased (in such poor health, as a matter of fact, that he can't even fend off the wild dogs that come to lick his sores). And we know he spends his last days hanging out at the entry way of this rich guy's abode, hoping to grab the scrapes that were thrown away from the rich guy's table.

What do we know about the rich guy? We know he is well-off, financially. We know he has enough, more than enough, to eat. We know that **he** knows who the beggar is who lives at his front gate. We learn that he has five brothers, that he cares about *at least* so much as to not want them to end up in the same place as he himself is in. What we do **not** know about this fellow is his name. How many rich folks do you know? Or if not rich, at least well-off? Do you know their names? How many poor, sick, homeless people do you know? Do you know their names? Don't you find it rather a bit odd, that we're told the homeless guy's name, but the rich, well-off, and probably somewhat powerful guy is left nameless? Do you see that our storyteller is trying to drive home a point here, by **not** naming the rich guy?

Anyway, what does this rich guy try to do? He attempts to do what I am guessing he has done for most of his life: he attempts to negotiate for a better deal.

Abraham, send the homeless guy to me with some water. Abraham, send the homeless guy to warn my brothers. Abraham, they'll listen to someone who rises from the dead.

So what's his motivation here? Supposedly, he wants to help his brothers, once he realizes that his own aid is denied. How does Abraham respond?

'Son, remember that during your lifetime you had everything you wanted, and Lazarus had nothing. So now he is here being comforted, and you are in anguish. (New Living Translation)

'Moses and the prophets have warned your brothers. They can read those writings anytime they want to.'

'If they won't listen to Moses and the prophets, they won't listen even if someone rises from the dead.'

Do you get that Jesus, the story teller, is really kind of sticking it to a certain group of folks? He's going after those who have allowed their financial wealth to blind them to those in need. More specifically, do you remember those verses I mentioned, right at the beginning of my message, the ones we did **not** get in our reading tonight? Let me read them now:

¹⁴ The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all this, and they ridiculed (Jesus). ¹⁵ So he said to them, "You are those who justify yourselves in the sight of others; but God knows your hearts; for what is prized by human beings is an abomination in the sight of God. (Lk. 16:14-15 NRS)

Ouch.

Oh, but wait, there's more. Did you catch that verse in our reading from Timothy?

⁶ Of course, there is great gain in godliness combined with contentment; ⁷ for we brought nothing into the world, so that we can take nothing out of it; ⁸ but if we have food and clothing, we will be content with these.

That pretty much applies to Lazarus, right? And, hopefully, most of us: be content with what we have. But it's those next verse, verse 9, that is damning:

⁹ But those who want to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction.

And then verse 10 brings it home by explaining:

¹⁰ For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains.

For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. This is often misquoted as just *Money is the root of all evil*, but that's not what Paul said. That's not what Jesus means, either. The rich man wasn't in Hades being tormented because he was rich. He was there and being tormented because he had the means to help Lazarus, and ignored him.

So to those of us who have enough, and then some; to those of us who are taking out a home equity loan in order to do some necessary repairs, but also do some nice things for ourselves, to make our homes more comfortable, to consolidate our credit card debt; to those of us who are comfortable, who don't really have to worry about where our next meal is coming from, or where we're going to sit out the rain storm, or whether we can get a full night's sleep without someone waking us up, telling us to move along, or trying to steal from our few meager belongings; for those of us who are too much like the rich man, whether we mean to be so or not: who are the Lazarus' in our lives? What will we do when we see those Lazarus'? Will we be able to see Lazarus, sitting there at the gate, or will we continue to walk by, seeing but not comprehending? How can we help in a way that is, indeed, help, and not simply enabling?

Those are some of the things with which we, who have enough, should be wrestling. How do we who *have*, and perhaps have *more than* enough, help those who *do not* have?

We want to be like Lazarus resting in the arms of Abraham, yet we too often live like the rich guy, who has more than enough for himself. I don't think we can do both. Remember, Jesus is **not** saying *Money is evil*. Being *wealthy* is **not** wrong. It is how we *handle* that money. It is whether we allow the wealth to *control* us, or if we control the wealth.

Which will it be in your life?

Amen.

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