

September 26, 2010

Scripture: Luke 16:19-31

Sermon: "Who is going to listen to me?"

We come to another interesting text that only Luke is crazy enough or smart enough to include in his gospel. The hard task that he lays before the preacher is figuring out which way to go. A preacher could easily do a sermon on the theological belief or concept of hell. A preacher could easily do a sermon on the theological belief or concept of the afterlife and what happens to us when we die. Or a preacher could go another direction which is what this preacher decided to do.

Plain and simple this sermon is about money and how we as people of faith should view money, use money and understand money, which shouldn't come as a surprise to any of us because that is a constant theme from the Gospel of Luke. Just think back to recent Scriptures that we have covered: We have heard a warning about putting our trust in our possessions rather than God. We have heard a warning about using our resources wisely to build up the Kingdom of God here on earth and we have heard a warning about not being able to serve two masters: wealth and God. Luke's gospel really encourages communities of faith to talk about the white elephant in the room: money. We know that it takes money to operate our churches. No one denies that but only Luke gives a word of caution and word of yes, fear, when it comes to money. Really all along Luke has been telling us to use our resources wisely and don't let them control us. And then we get today's Scripture, a peculiar story about the rich man and Lazarus. And we begin to wonder where Luke is going with his money talk now.

To be honest, this story makes us a little uncomfortable and makes us squirm in our seats for many different reasons; one being that it is just a little too graphic. Luke tells us all the details. the sores, the dogs, the bandages Not a pretty picture. But that's not the only reason this story makes us uncomfortable.

we are also uncomfortable because we don't like the image that it suggests: that grace isn't enough, that we will be judged on our actions or lack of actions, or that there will even be judgment at all. It goes against what we believe and what we preach. It goes against the principles of the Kingdom of God. It goes against the God that we all know and have experienced in our lives. But that's not the main reason we are uncomfortable, and yes even a little scared by this text and like many, try to avoid this text.

I think one of the main reasons that we are so uncomfortable with this text is that it is a little too real for us because We know that this story could happen and is happening in our world today. this is not an image that we like to claim as humanity or be forced to deal with on Sunday mornings as people of faith. But it is one that we cannot deny is happening in our world today. Which puts us in this weird reality with the Scriptures that we would rather avoid. And if we are honest with ourselves we would admit that We like knowing that we can say that these stories happened a long time ago, in a different time and in a different context and to different people.

But we can do that with this story. It could happen right here in Midway. It could happen right here in Lexington. Sure the people may change, the clothes may be a little different, the amount of wealth displayed may be a little more. But we can't say that this story can't happen today in

our time. Think about it: We've seen images of limos driving through the streets while men and women rummage through trash cans. We've seen images of shoppers leaving department stores with bags full of designer labels while men and women sit at the doors of these very stores, hoping someone will give them something warm to wear.

The disturbing fact is that Luke grabs onto a universal truth, a statement that is true for all generations, for all contexts, for all people, for all societies: that there are rich people and there are poor people and there is a great chasm between the rich and the poor, and it is growing deeper and wider with each passing year.

Now before I get much father, I will say that as I was preparing this sermon, I kept thinking, Yes, but...I'm not on either side of this great chasm between the rich and the poor. I'm somewhere in the middle. where do I fit in? What is Luke saying to me? How does this text apply to me? A middle class person who really has never experienced poverty or gone without, well, anything that I didn't want or didn't need. Sure I will admit, like most of us, that there have been times when I have felt like my wallet is open and I just keep watching the money go out the door. But really, I'm doing okay. I'm not rich but I'm not poor. I'm somewhere in the middle of this great chasm. So what is Luke trying to say to me?

I have to admit that as I was preparing this sermon, I kept thinking that this text just doesn't relate to me. Luke must have written this text for someone else, someone with more money than me, someone who is in danger of letting their wealth take over, someone who needs a little reminder again of using our resources wisely to build up the Kingdom of God here on earth, someone else that wasn't me until one of the commentators challenged her readers to go to the website titled Global Rich list and see where one would fall compared to the rest of the world. And I have to tell you, this was an eye opening experience. I went to this website with some preconceived notions. I know that since that I am American, I would probably fall within the upper percentile but I was thinking the 20% percentile at the highest because Forbes just released their richest people list, and I am not on it.

So I entered just my salary alone and the numbers came back: I was part of the top 4.62 % of the richest people in the world on just my salary. My salary which at times I think isn't enough, my salary that I keep saying that if only it were just a little bit bigger, some of my problems would go away, My salary that is small in comparison to Bill Gates'. My salary put me in the top 4.62% percentile of the richest people in the world.

The good news is that I'm richer than I thought. The bad news: is that there are so many more people who are below me on that list. People who go to bed hungry every night. People who wonder where their next meal is come from. People who live on less than a dollar a day. People who I have not seen or if I am honest with myself, refused to see. People that I have walked by. People that I have turned a blind eye to. People that I have not truly seen as human beings.

I'm richer than I thought. Great news, but not really... this text hit home a little more when I realized that I was richer than I thought, especially when the numbers were there, staring me in the face in black and white. Good news, yet not really...

These numbers bring home the harsh reality of our world. These numbers bring home our calling as people of faith a little more. These numbers are exactly what Luke is driving at in this text. Because it was in that moment, I realized that I wasn't in the middle of this great big chasm between the rich and the poor. I was on one side of the chasm along with the rich, with the have's while so many of my brothers and sisters in faith are on the other side. And I knew in that moment that I was on the wrong side.

And that is exactly where this text from Luke puts us: On the wrong side of the chasm, just like the rich man in our story. The harsh reality for many of us is that we didn't even think we were on the wrong side. We thought that we were somewhere in the middle and that this story didn't relate to us. We wouldn't categorize ourselves as the "have's", that's someone else, someone who is really rich, with money to burn, not us average people.

But this text brings us to reality and confronts us with the fact that yes, we are part of the have's, we are part of that group that really doesn't have to worry about money, that we are part of that group that is "have" side while many of our brothers and sisters are on the have not side.

And now we find ourselves asking what's the good news for us, now we find ourselves asking what are we called to do, now we find ourselves wondering how Father Abraham would receive us on that day.

the good news, Luke reminds us, is that we have the Scriptures to teach us and to guide us. The good news is that this story serves as a reminder of what our purpose, our calling, as people of faith really is here on earth,, to be motivated and empowered to Do something to live into the Kingdom of God, God's justice and God's peace. thankfully, Luke reminds us that the good news is an invitation to open our eyes and really see our brothers and sisters on the other side and figure out how we can get everyone on the same side.

The good news came to me when I realized that for just one hour's worth of my time monetarily, I can make some choices that would change people's lives. one hour, that's not a lot money until I read farther and saw what my hour could really do: For example: for \$8, I could buy 15 organic apples OR 25 fruit trees for farmers in Honduras to grow and sell fruit at their local market. For \$30 I could buy a DVD Boxset OR a First Aid kit for a village in Haiti. For\$73 I could buy a new mobile phone OR a new mobile health clinic to care for AIDS orphans in Uganda. For\$2400, I could buy High Definition TV OR schooling for an entire generation of school children in an Angolan village.

this uncomfortable text from Luke becomes an invitation for all of us, all of us as people of faith, rich, poor and in the middle to open our eyes and see each other as human beings, to see each other as children of God, to see each other as precious in his sight, to build a bridge across this great chasm that divides and separates us into the have's and the have nots.

Luke's point to this story is that it is not the money that is bad. It is the choices that we sometimes make with our money that are bad and that have lasting consequences on our brothers and sisters in faith. Our story today reminds all of us as people of faith that all of our choices should be based upon the "heart and soul of Scripture which is God's deep desire to create a people of hospitality and welcome for the poor and for the stranger."

That's it. That is what should motivate all that we do as people of faith. At the heart of it, what should motivate us, empower us, inspire the choices that we make in our lives should be the understanding that our God first saw us when we couldn't even see ourselves, that our God welcomed us when we thought no one else would welcome us, that our God first loved us when we thought no one loved us, that our God gave us all that God had when we had nothing to claim as our own.

That is why this text makes us so uncomfortable because we are forced to realize that we cannot ignore the chasm any longer. We cannot turn a blind eye to the great divide any longer, that we cannot deny the gap any longer because this gap, this divide, this chasm threatens the unity, the wholeness, the one-ness of the Body of Christ here on earth.

The Good news is that we are richer than we all thought. The great news is that we are called to be the Body of Christ here on earth and be agents of change for all of God's children. The Good news is that we are full of life's blessings. The great news is that we can share these blessings with all of God's children. The good news is that we have more than enough to meet our needs. The great news is that we have more than enough to meet all the needs of God's children by building a bridge across the great chasm that divides, separates, and threatens the Body of Christ here on earth.

The Good new is that we are blessed. The Great news is that our God is a God of abundance and has provided more than enough resources to go around.

May we always remember that we are richer than we could ever imagine. Amen.