

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 25, 2022

LUKE 16:19-31

TRADITIONAL

THERE'S NOTHING QUITE LIKE A SERMON ABOUT A RICH GUY GOING TO HELL AS WE HIGHLIGHT OUR ACCESSIBILITY PROJECT, IS THERE?

PARABLES ARE MEANT TO GIVE US A GLIMPSE INTO THE KINGDOM OF GOD. THEY BRING TO LIFE THE VALUES, THE KINGDOM LOGIC THAT JESUS PROCLAIMS, AND THEY REVEAL WHAT IS AT THE HEART OF GOD. INTERPRETING THE PARABLE REQUIRES US TO PAY ATTENTION TO BOTH WHAT IS SAID AND WHAT IS LEFT UNSAID.

AS WE HAVE SEEN IN OUR GOSPELS OVER THE LAST MONTH OR SO, JESUS IS A MASTER STORY-TELLER WHO SPINS A TALE WHERE THE CHARACTERS ARE EXAGGERATED AND THE SITUATION IS OVER-SIMPLIFIED. AND BOTH ARE DONE IN ORDER TO MAKE THE MESSAGE CLEAR.

JESUS INVITES US TO CONSIDER THE PLIGHT OF BOTH CHARACTERS AND THEN DECIDE FOR OURSELVES THE "WHY". IN THIS CASE, DAMNATION.

THE CONVERSATION BETWEEN THE RICH MAN AND ABRAHAM REVEALS THAT THE RICH MAN, EVEN THOUGH HE CHOSE TO IGNORE LAZARUS WHO WAS DYING OUTSIDE HIS GATED COMMUNITY, ACTUALLY KNOWS HIM BY NAME. ISN'T IT INTERESTING THAT THE RICH MAN, IN THE AFTERLIFE, STILL FEELS ENTITLED TO ASK FOR SERVICE AND CARE AND CONSIDERATION FROM THE MAN HE CHOSE TO IGNORE EVERY DAY. EVEN IN HELL – THE RICH MAN WANTS THE POOR TO SAVE HIS FAMILY – HE BELIEVES THAT EVEN IN HELL, HE HAS MORE PRIVILEGE THAN LAZARUS. WHAT AN ATTITUDE OF ARROGANCE.

IT'S CLEAR THAT THIS PARABLE REFLECTS GOD'S CONCERN FOR THE POOR AND EXPECTS US TO DO THE SAME. SCRIPTURE RESOUNDS THIS MESSAGE THROUGHOUT BOTH THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS.

YOU AND I REFLECT THE PRESENCE OF GOD IN OUR LIVES BY SHARING HIS CONCERNS AND BY ACTING AS HE ACTS. THIS DOESN'T MEAN THAT THE POOR ARE OUR TICKET INTO HEAVEN. WE CANNOT BUY OUR WAY TO HEAVEN. NO, BUT WE HELP THE POOR, FEED THE HUNGRY, HOUSE THE HOMELESS, CARE FOR THE SICK, VISIT THE PRISONERS AND SEEK JUSTICE FOR ALL GOD'S PEOPLE BECAUSE THAT'S WHAT IT MEANS TO BE THE BODY OF CHRIST.

SEE, THIS IS NOT A STORY ABOUT RICH PEOPLE GOING TO HELL AND POOR PEOPLE GOING TO HEAVEN. IT'S NOT SO MUCH ABOUT OUR FUTURE BUT ABOUT OUR PRESENT LIVES. IT'S ABOUT HOW WE LIVE IN THE HERE AND NOW AND HOW THAT HAS CONSEQUENCES IN THE NEXT. IT'S A REMINDER THAT OUR LIVES ARE CONNECTED AND INTERTWINED BOTH IN THIS WORLD AND THE NEXT.

SEE THE REALITY IS THAT AT SOME POINT IN OUR LIVES, WE MAY ALL HAVE BEEN BOTH THE RICH MAN AND LAZARUS. WE CAN NAME TIMES WHEN LIFE HAS BEEN GOOD, FULL AND EASY. LIKEWISE, WE CAN NAME TIMES WHEN IT HAS SIMPLY LEFT US DESTITUTE, BROKEN AND IN SORROW AND SUFFERING. NONE OF US IS EXEMPT FROM EITHER. SO, INSTEAD OF MAKING JUDGEMENTS ABOUT WHO IS WHO, I THINK WE ARE BEING ASKED TO DEAL WITH A MUCH BIGGER ISSUE – THAT WHICH DIVIDES – THAT WHICH SEPARATES US ONE FROM ANOTHER.

SEE, FROM BEGINNING TO END, THE PARABLE IS FULL OF DIVISIONS AND SEPARATIONS. REMEMBER THE GATE AT THE BEGINNING? ON ONE SIDE OF THE GATE (ON THE OUTSIDE), IS LAZARUS, COVERED IN SORES, DOG SLOBBER, HUNGRY AND UNABLE TO GET UP AND WALK. ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE GATE (THE INSIDE), IS THE RICH MAN, DRESSED IN FINE LINEN AND PURPLE, SITTING AT HIS TABLE LADEN WITH SUMPTIONS FOODS, AND FEASTS EVERY DAY.

REMEMBER THE CHASM AT THE END? ON THE ONE SIDE OF THE CHASM (THE INSIDE) SITS LAZARUS, COMFORTED AND COMFORTABLE IN THE BOSOM OF ABRAHAM. ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE CHASM (THE OUTSIDE), THE RICH MAN IS STANDING, TORMENTED IN THE FLAMES OF HELL.

THE GATE AT THE BEGINNING AND THE CHASM AT THE END ARE THE SAME THING – A SEPARATION THAT WENT FROM THIS WORLD TO THE NEXT – WHY? BECAUSE THE RICH MAN CARRIED IT WITH HIM – IT WAS A PART OF HIM – PART OF HIS WAY OF BEING. SO WHEN HE TELLS ABRAHAM TO HAVE LAZARUS DO HIS BIDDING FOR HIS FAMILY, IT SHOWS HIS HEART AND MIND.

HERE'S THE THING – WHAT SEPARATES US AND DIVIDES US IN THIS WORLD IS NOT A CONDITION OF CIRCUMSTANCES – NOT WHETHER WE ARE RICH OR POOR OR ANY OTHER CATEGORY YOU MIGHT ASCRIBE TO. RATHER WHAT SEPARATES US IS A CONDITION OF THE

HUMAN HEART. THE GATE THAT BECOMES A CHASM ALWAYS EXISTS WITHIN US BEFORE IT EXISTS BETWEEN US.

THAT MEANS YOU AND I MUST EXAMINE OUR OWN HEART TO FIND OUT WHAT SEPARATES US FROM OUR NEIGHBOR, OR OUR ENEMY, OR THOSE WE LOVE, AND ULTIMATELY, GOD.

MAYBE THE GATE IS FEAR OR ANGER, GREED OR PRIDE, PREJUDICE, LONELINESS, SORROW, ADDICTION, BUSYNESS, INDIFFERENCE, APATHY, HURT, RESENTMENT, ENVY, CYNICISM, MISTRUST – AND THE LIST IS ENDLESS – YOU GET THE IDEA. THERE ARE A WHOLE MYRIAD OF POSSIBILITIES FOR THE GATE WITHIN US. AND WE ALL HAVE THEM. IT'S WHY WE CONFESS EVERY TIME WE GATHER, BECAUSE THOSE BARRIERS ARE WHAT DESTROY RELATIONSHIPS.

HERE'S THE THING, THOUGH – EVERY TIME WE LOVE OUR NEIGHBOR AS OURSELVES, EVERY TIME WE LOVE OUR ENEMIES, EVERY TIME WE SEE AND TREAT ONE ANOTHER AS CREATED IN THE IMAGE AND LIKENESS OF GOD, GATES ARE OPENED AND BARRIERS BROUGHT DOWN. IT ISN'T EASY, BUT IT'S POSSIBLE. IT'S WHAT JESUS SHOWS US THROUGH HIS LIFE, DEATH AND RESURRECTION.

AND MIND YOU, OF OUR OWN VOLITION, WE CANNOT DO THIS, BE THIS. RATHER, IT IS JESUS' LOVE AND MERCY, GRACE AND PRESENCE WORKING IN EACH OF US THAT ALLOWS OUR HEARTS TO BE CHANGED AND BARRIERS BROUGHT DOWN.

THIS IS WHAT THE KINGDOM OF GOD LOOKS LIKE. WE ALREADY HAVE EVERYTHING WE NEED. THAT WAS ABRAHAM'S POINT IN NOT SENDING LAZARUS TO THE RICH MAN'S BROTHERS. ABRAHAM WAS NOT DENYING THEM ANYTHING, BECAUSE NOTHING WAS LACKING. THEY ALREADY HAD EVERYTHING THEY NEEDED TO HEED GOD'S WORD. THE WORD OF GOD THAT USHERS IN HIS KINGDOM BY BREAKING DOWN THE BARRIERS OF OUR HEARTS IS THE SAME WORD OF GOD PROCLAIMED BY MOSES AND THE PROPHETS, THE VERY SAME WORD EMBODIED IN THE PERSON OF JESUS CHRIST. MAY HIS WORD BE OUR ENOUGH, ENOUGH TO CHANGE OUR HEARTS, ENOUGH TO OPEN WIDE GOD'S KINGDOM BEFORE US, HERE ON EARTH AS IN HEAVEN. ISN'T THAT WHAT WE PRAY EACH WEEK? THY KINGDOM COME...

AND LEST YOU THINK THIS PARABLE IS ABOUT OUR DESTINATION BASED ON WORKS, REMEMBER THIS – JESUS DIDN'T TELL PARABLES TO DEFINE OUR SALVATION – HE TOLD THEM TO OFFER A GLIMPSE INTO THE KINGDOM AND HEART OF GOD. AND WHAT WE CAN TELL

FROM THIS PARABLE IS THAT GOD WANTS US TO SEE, TO CARE FOR AND TO LOVE THOSE IN NEED. AND IF WE WON'T, THEN GOD MOST CERTAINLY WILL.

BECAUSE GOD HAS SPOKEN TO US. HE HAS TOLD US OF HIS LOVE AND MERCY IN THE PERSON OF JESUS, THE MESSIAH. HE HAS GIVEN US THESE PROMISES, AND WHEN THEY WORK FAITH IN OUR HEARTS AND WE CLING TO THEM, THEN RICH OR POOR, HIGH OR LOW, WE WILL GO TO THE BOSOM OF ABRAHAM.

BUT IT DOESN'T MATTER WHERE A PERSON IS IN THEIR LIOFE, WHETHER RICH OR POOR, HIGH OR LOW. IF THEY DO NOT GIVE HEED TO WHAT GOD SAYS, IF THEY REJECT HIS PROMISES, THEN THEY WILL BE IN THE SAME PLACE AS THE RICH MAN.

SO LET US HEAR, LET US BELIEVE, LET US CLING TO WHAT GOD HAS DONE FOR US IN JESUS CHRIST, AND WHEN THE LAST DAY OF OUR LIFE HAS COME, THEN THE ANGELS WILL WING US TO THE BOSOM OF ABRAHAM AS WELL. IN THE NAME OF JESUS, LET THOSE WHO HAVE EARS TO HEAR, LISTEN. AMEN