

Sep 25 2022PNT 16

## Luke 16

“There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. <sup>20</sup>And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, <sup>21</sup>who longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man’s table; even the dogs would come and lick his sores. <sup>22</sup>The poor man died and was carried away by the angels to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried. <sup>23</sup>In Hades, where he was being tormented, he looked up and saw Abraham far away with Lazarus by his side. <sup>24</sup>He called out, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am in agony in these flames.’ <sup>25</sup>But Abraham said, ‘Child, remember that during your lifetime you received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in agony. <sup>26</sup>Besides all this, between you and us a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who might want to pass from here to you cannot do so, and no one can cross from there to us.’ <sup>27</sup>He said, ‘Then, father, I beg you to send him to my father’s house— <sup>28</sup>for I have five brothers—that he may warn them, so that they will not also come into this place of torment.’ <sup>29</sup>Abraham replied, ‘They have Moses and the prophets; they should listen to them.’ <sup>30</sup>He said, ‘No, father Abraham; but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’ <sup>31</sup>He said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.’”

SERMON: So what’s the preacher’s response? Beat up on rich people? Guilt congregations into giving to the poor? I think we begin by seeing something of ourselves and our society as we overhear the parable.

What if we are the rich person's siblings? One of my favourite authorities on the book of Revelation, Dr. Barbara Rossing contends that we are. We too have heard Moses and the prophets plead for justice. We HAVE had someone return from the dead who calls on us to remember the poor.

If Oxfam International's statistics hold up, we can watch the parable lived out every moment of the day. From March 2020 to November 2021, a new billionaire was created every 26 hours, according to the (Oxfam's)report.

Meanwhile, the organization estimated that over 160 million people have been pushed into poverty in that time. As the band plays on, Lazarus and his kin get poorer, hungrier and sicker.

Oxfam's report states that the great chasm between rich and poor in the world means that someone dies every four seconds from lack of food, medicine, safe drinking water, shelter, and protection from abuse.

One faithful response is to question our place in the systems we benefit from at others' expense.

Desmond Tutu was fond of saying that as important as it is to rescue those who've fallen in the river, before long we must walk up stream and learn why they're falling in in the first place.

A couple weeks ago, Sharon and I overheard a shouting match between a mouthy youth and someone encamped alongside the canal. The question of 'why are you homeless' reeked with accusation and insult. I wished I could ask other questions—what happened in your life that you're here? How does our society fail you? Who's looking out for you? What helps?

Another faithful response is to realize 99 percent of us live precarious lives so let's stop making moral judgements where the rich are righteous and the lacking are lazy.

I said to Sharon, most of us are only one or two bad breaks away from poverty and homelessness ourselves. Inflation runs rampant. NPR interviewed an office manager of a medical firm who can't pay her bills. Her clinic gave raises too...the bigger paycheque is illusion because the cost of everything increases even faster so that nearly everyone is losing money year in and year out.

A third faithful response is to remember God's special concern for the poor. Moses? The prophets? Jesus? Fun fact about Jesus' story—the name Lazarus means Our God helps. The rich person goes unnamed until centuries later when someone calls him Dives, which translates roughly as “rich dude”. That little detail can remind us Jesus wasn't kidding when he says Blessed are the poor. Poverty is not the blessing. It's just God has a particular soft spot for the underdog.

May God rain down compassion upon us—May become what our baptism proclaims us to be—joined to God's mission for the life of this world God so loves. Amen