



***BIBLE STUDY for the  
SIXTEENTH SUNDAY after PENTECOST***



**Focus Text: Luke 16: 19 - 31**

**Additional texts: Jeremiah 32: 1-3a, 6-15; Psalm 91: 1-6; 1 Timothy 6: 6-19**

This parable of the rich man and Lazarus is one in a series of lengthy parables Jesus shared with a large traveling crowd.

These crowds included Jesus' disciples, tax collectors and sinners, Pharisees, lawyers, and scribes (Luke 14:25; 15:1,3,8,11; 16:1, 14). The parables primarily concern well-off or rich men. They are about the father who throws a lavish feast for his younger son when he returns home penniless after having squandered the inheritance given him (15:11-32); the owner of a hundred sheep who recovers the one that strayed from the flock (15:3-7); the rich man who accuses his slave manager of squandering his property (16:1-13); and a rich man who has no compassion for a poor man named Lazarus (16:19-31), which is our Gospel text for this week.

Luke's Jesus offers significant advice for men with wealth and social position: they should not take the VIP seats at feasts (Luke 14:7); they should invite the poor, dis-eased, and marginalized to their lavish feasts rather than their elite friends and family and folks who can return the invitation (14:21-24); they should consider selling all their possessions and redistribute the proceeds to the poor (18:18-25); be commended for giving half their possessions to the poor and making restitution to those they defrauded (19:1-10); and he shames the rich who contribute gifts to the Temple from their wealth, while a poor widow sacrifices so much and they gave relatively little (21:1-4). Unlike most politicians today who focus on the so-called "middle class" as if the poor matter less, Jesus is concerned with the poor, sick, and marginalized. As wealth becomes concentrated with the top one to two percent of a population, masses live in poverty. Jesus attempts to raise the consciousness of the rich about poverty, compassion, and social inequality.

In our parable the rich man is anonymous; he wears purple attire made of fine linen, which is the colour of royalty and is of high social status. He eats as lavishly as he dresses, as do other elites and rich people (Luke 16:19; see also 15:22-23). As he feasts and wears expensive clothing in his gated house, a poor hungry man languishes at the base of the rich man's gate. His name is Lazarus. Naming him humanizes him. Perhaps leaving the rich man nameless signifies how love of wealth over love of people dehumanizes and desensitizes people to others' suffering so that 'subordinates' are treated with indifference, hatred, and cruelty.

Nevertheless, Lazarus hopes to eat at least the crumbs and leftovers from the rich man's feasts. A society desensitized to suffering and hunger would rather have pets than hungry human beings eat the leftovers. Not that pets shouldn't eat either. Only the dogs show mercy on Lazarus,

licking his sore-covered body. Perhaps, Lazarus hoped each day would be different. Perhaps, the base of the gate surrounding the rich man's house was the safest place for a poor man without shelter to sleep and beg.

Eventually both the rich man and Lazarus die, as all do, regardless of social position (Luke 16:22). Our social status and poverty or wealth do not accompany us. Lazarus likely died because of his poverty and the disease that poverty causes. Many health problems are associated with poverty, and the poor are disproportionately subjected to diverse forms of violence. In fact, the violence to which the poor are subjected interferes with the ability to improve their lives. Death is not speechless here. The angels transport the poor man away to be with Abraham, but the rich man ends up in hot Hades (the underworld) where Lazarus with Abraham commune in plain view (16:22-24).

The (formerly rich) man shouts to Abraham with a familiarity and sense of subordination. Referring to him as 'Father Abraham,' he asks that Abraham demonstrate mercy by sending Lazarus to cool his tongue by dipping his finger in water and placing it in his mouth to alleviate his agony (Luke 16:25). In death as in life, the man treats Lazarus as if he is a subordinate whose purpose is to serve him. If Abraham is father, the man is child (16:26). Abraham reminds him that in life he received good things, and Lazarus received evil things, but now the reversed is true (see also 1:46-55). Lazarus is comforted; the man is in agony. Poor people are not evil, but poverty and disease are evils that can be alleviated. God does not create poverty; human beings do. What humans create, humans can fix, if they so desire.

An insurmountable chasm separates the once rich man from those who would help him (Luke 16:27). If he cannot be helped maybe, he begs, Father Abraham can send "him" to warn his five brothers so they do not also end up in Hades (16:28). The rich man still appears not to know Lazarus' name. Abraham responds that his five brothers have access to the same prophetic oracles and Mosaic teachings that he had: perform justice for orphans and widows, love strangers by providing food and clothing; do justice and love kindness (Deuteronomy 10:19; Micah 6:8). Just as he did not heed the Scriptures, neither will his brothers even if someone returns from the dead to warn them (16:29-30). We have the teachings of the resurrected Jesus, and yet we too fail to love our neighbours, in very tangible, just, and merciful ways; we build fences, gates and walls and then justify them (6:7-36; 10:36-37).

(From the Working Preacher website)

**We are challenged today to think about wealth and poverty, the rich and the poor.**

**What do you do in your community to help alleviate poverty?**

**Should you give more of your resources: time or money?**

**What is God saying to you?**

Let us pray

Holy God,

You reach out in love through Jesus Christ to save us  
so that we may live as faithful servants of You alone.

Unchain us from our desire for wealth and power  
so that we may, in turn, release others  
from the prisons of poverty, hunger, and oppression.

Amen.

