

Where is Your Place?

Luke 16:19-31

September 30, 2007

Gospel Lesson

¹⁹ Jesus said, “There was a certain rich man who was splendidly clothed and who lived each day in luxury. ²⁰ At his door lay a diseased beggar named Lazarus. ²¹ As Lazarus lay there longing for scraps from the rich man’s table, the dogs would come and lick his open sores. ²² Finally, the beggar died and was carried by the angels to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried, ²³ and his soul went to the place of the dead. There, in torment, he saw Lazarus in the far distance with Abraham.

²⁴ “The rich man shouted, ‘Father Abraham, have some pity! Send Lazarus over here to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in anguish in these flames.’

²⁵ “But Abraham said to him, ‘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. ²⁶ And besides, there is a great chasm separating us. Anyone who wanted to cross over to you from here is stopped at its edge, and no one there can cross over to us.’

²⁷ “Then the rich man said, ‘Please, Father Abraham, send him to my father’s home. ²⁸ For I have five brothers, and I want him to warn them about this place of torment so they won’t have to come here when they die.’

²⁹ “But Abraham said, ‘Moses and the prophets have warned them. Your brothers can read their writings anytime they want to.’

³⁰ “The rich man replied, ‘No, Father Abraham! But if someone is sent to them from the dead, then they will turn from their sins.’

³¹ “But Abraham said, ‘If they won’t listen to Moses and the prophets, they won’t listen even if someone rises from the dead.’”(1)

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

In this morning's Gospel lesson Jesus is again talking about the difference between the rich and the poor. The Pharisees considered the rich as people that were righteous and the poor as people who are lowly and outcast. When Jesus tells this story it surprises them that the rich man is punished while the poor man, Lazarus is rewarded. This Lazarus is not the same man as the brother of Mary and Martha.

The rich man, who remains nameless, is blinded by his wealth and doesn't even see Lazarus, the poor man, who is named. This is kind of ironic. The man who has the wealth and position,

1*Holy Bible, New Living Translation*, (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.) 1996.

we have no idea what his name is, while the poor man, who most people at that time probably only knew him as a poor dirty beggar, all these years later we still know what his name is. An important point in this story is that we use what we have not to our own glory, but to help those around us.

Another point is that it's not the money we have that is important in our faith life. You can be rich or poor; no matter how much money you have the most important thing is to focus your life on the divine power and love of God. Many times those that have money focus more on the things they have in life, while those that don't have much financially, focus on the love of God. I have heard stories from people that visited some villages in Africa. The people barely have enough to live on, yet they are some of the happiest people on earth. The focus of their life is their faith in God. They are grateful for the small blessing in their lives, such as enough food and water to get through a day. When they have a worship service, it can last for three hours or more. They are so caught up in praising God that time doesn't matter. God has done so much for us that we shouldn't worry about how long our worship service is. Taking time to praise Him should not be set with a stopwatch.

As this story is set up, we see how much the rich man has. His clothing is of the finest around, and he feasts everyday, not just has food to eat each day. Then in contrast we see Lazarus, who lays on the ground at the rich man's gate, is in such a bad state that he is dirty and covered with sores. He would be happy to just have the scraps from the rich man's table. He is in such a bad state that the dogs are licking him. The rich man is so consumed with his wealth that he can't see that Lazarus needs help. Unfortunately, the same thing can happen today. We can get so busy with our lives that we don't see the needs around us.

Now is when the story switches gears. Both the rich man and Lazarus die, however the rich man goes to Hades where he can't even get a drop of water to quench his thirst. Then he sees Lazarus is sitting with father Abraham and has all that he needs. He pleads with Abraham to send Lazarus to give him a drop of water. But the roles have reversed; Lazarus now is the one who has all, and the rich man has nothing. However the rich man still looks at Lazarus as someone who can serve him.

Since Abraham won't let Lazarus cross the chasm to take water to the rich man, he then asks if Lazarus can go tell his brothers to heed what they have read in the scriptures and not be blind to the love of God. Abraham again says no. They have to read the scripture and can listen to the message of God sent by Moses and the Prophets. The rich man argues that if Lazarus rises from the dead that they will then believe the message. Abraham tells him that they have to believe on their own.

Ironically the one telling this story is Jesus. It is a warning to all of us. He did come back from the dead to save each of us, but many still don't believe. We have the whole story. We know His message of how we are to love and care for others, and how much He and His Father, God, love us. Jesus came to teach us how to live, then took all of our sins upon Himself and died to take away our sins forever. Unfortunately, not all people hear this story and follow its message, we still have people today that are blinded but what they have in life.

The flowing is a story of how a poor man helped a rich man and the blessing that came from this help. It's called:

Irish Blessing

His name was Fleming, and he was a poor Scottish farmer. One day, while trying to make a living for his family, he heard a cry for help coming from a nearby bog. He dropped his tools and ran to the bog.

There, mired to his waist in black muck, was a terrified boy, screaming and struggling to free himself. Farmer Fleming saved the lad from what could have been a slow and terrifying death.

The next day, a fancy carriage pulled up to the Scotsman's sparse surroundings. An elegantly dressed nobleman stepped out and introduced himself as the father of the boy Farmer Fleming had saved.

"I want to repay you," said the nobleman. "You saved my son's life."

"No, I can't accept payment for what I did," the Scottish farmer replied waving off the offer. At that moment, the farmer's own son came to the door of the family hovel.

"Is that your son?" the nobleman asked.

"Yes," the farmer replied proudly.

"I'll make you a deal. Let me provide him with the level of education my own son will enjoy. If the lad is anything like his father, he'll no doubt grow to be a man we both will be proud of." And that he did.

Farmer Fleming's son attended the very best schools and in time, graduated from St. Mary's Hospital Medical School in London, and went on to become known throughout the world as the noted Sir Alexander Fleming, the discoverer of Penicillin.

Years afterward, the same nobleman's son who was saved from the bog was stricken with pneumonia. What saved his life this time? Penicillin.

The name of the nobleman? Lord Randolph Churchill. His son's name? Sir Winston Churchill.

You never know when a small deed can turn into a blessing. Having money is not the problem; it's the love of the money that causes us to sin. Remember that we are like the five brothers. We have the words of the scripture to guide us as to how to live our lives and to use our life in service to God, not to money and things. We have our warning; the question now is "Where is your place in this world?"

Amen.