

March 14, 2021

Fourth Sunday of Lent

Lazarus and the Rich man

Children's message: There was a church theologian named Karl Barth. He was considered a great thinker on the matters of scripture. In his later years someone asked him what was the most important lesson he learned as a scholar. The answer shocked everyone. He just replied with, "Jesus loves me this I know, for the bible tells me so." Being aware that God loves us and seeing it in our lives.

The story of Lazarus and the rich man is all about God's love. God loved both Lazarus and the rich man. The rich man had everything he could ever want. Lazarus had nothing, not even his health. When they die, the rich man goes to hell and Lazarus goes to heaven. The rich man does not go to hell because he was rich, but because he did not have mercy and could not share with Lazarus. God loves us and gives us everything and He expects us to love as He does. That means sharing and having mercy is an expression of love. The rich man did not know how to give love or how to receive it. He made poor choices in his life.

God could not love us any more than He already does. Do we choose to reject His love by not sharing as the rich man did? We become happy when we love and we do that by sharing. One cannot be happy by gathering and collecting things and keeping them to yourself. After a while you will get tired of the things you have collected. Then you will look for something else. However you can become very happy by sharing the things you have. Think about Halloween and Christmas morning. It is more fun sharing your loot with someone on Halloween.

You may have something to share that someone has never tried. Sharing your toys on Christmas morning is great. You may have gotten something another person did get, but wants to play with it. Sharing is a great expression of love. Learn it early in your life and do it as much as you can.

When we share the love and kindness, God gives us more. When we empty our hearts of love and kindness, God will refill it and give us more of His love and kindness. Then we will have more love to share. Remember the rich man and that if he shared his stuff with Lazarus he would be with him in heaven.

Adult's message: When we hear this passage in Luke our minds go to many places. This passage conjures up many ideas and images in our heads. The one that comes to mind is that of Cosmic Justice. The Hindus call it Karma. That what goes around comes around. That what you do in this life impacts our eternal life. The physical and spiritual dimensions are very connected. This is a very new idea for first century Judaism. Ultimately God is in control.

This passage also harkens back to hints of Cain and Abel. Genesis 4:8-11, "And when they were in the field Cain rose up against his brother Abel, and killed him. Then the Lord said to Cain, 'Where is your brother Abel?' Cain said, 'I do not know; am I my brothers' keeper?' AND THE Lord said, "What have you done? Listen your brothers' blood is crying out to me from the ground." The Lord could also ask the rich man the same question about Lazarus.

With this being the fourth Sunday of Lent, I thought it proper to keep our eyes on the prize and to look to Easter with hope. The concept of hope is in this passage. Mind you it is often overlooked and ignored. We find it in the most surprising character in the story.

Christianity has always and will forever be a religion of hope in the face of insurmountable odds. Without hope, faith and love dry up very quickly. This takes us to the rich man who is in a place of great torment. We can only imagine the smell of sulfur and the heat and flames. Yet in the midst of this torment, he is the one who holds out hope. Not so much for himself, but for others. Now he is thinking of someone other than himself. He couldn't do this when he was alive and had Lazarus at his gate. The rich man's example reminds us that hope can exist everywhere. Even in the torments of the afterlife. This rich miser who cared nothing for the poor and dying Lazarus at his door is now showing a sliver of compassion for others. He is worried about his brothers who may end up where he is. The rich man seems to be resolved in his thinking that his lot is permanent. In his torment he asks for one drop of water to ease his pain. One drop is not going to do much in such a hot place. It will evaporate before it reaches his lips. It is interesting that his request is denied. Why would it be denied? Yet he still hopes. Abraham explains that Lazarus cannot cross the chasm between them. It is just impossible. Then the rich man asks for someone to go to his brothers to warn them about the place he is in. So they can avoid it.

This is a very tiny opening of hope. We should know by now that is all God needs is a tiny opening into a human heart to do great things. Remember the Prodigal son from last week. I think that this is the rich man's sweet moment. He has hit the hot rock bottom and is changing

his thinking to the welfare of others. The rich man only comes to this moment because of his torment. It is not pigs. His torment will also come to an end.

Abraham answers the rich man that Moses and the prophets should be enough for his brother to repent. I am sure there was a twinkle in Jesus's eye when He said, "They wouldn't believe even if someone should rise from the dead?" I love His humour, it is so cheeky. Jesus knew that Moses and the prophets would not be enough for these people. Truly someone would have to rise from the dead for there to be hope for anyone. Jesus will be that hope for the rich man. The resurrection of Jesus on Easter morning would empty the chambers of hell. Tradition tells us that Jesus went to hell on Holy Saturday and preached to those in torment. On Easter morning hell is as empty as Our Lord's tomb was. There was hope even in hell. Christ was and continues to be our hope.

This passage is a prophesy about Our Lord's coming resurrection and the hope it will bring humanity. This hope has a mysterious unrealized potential. Some will see it and others will not. Jesus is that one drop of water that the rich man asked for to relieve his pain. Our Lord's cross would be the bridge that would span the great chasm. Our Lord's resurrection would be that small ray of hope that would become a sunburst. The rich man encourages us to never lose hope. As the children of God we put our hope in His son Jesus Christ.

God Bless and have a great week, Pastor Daren O'Gealbain.