



SERMONS AT SAINT MARK'S

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THE SIXTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST, SEPTEMBER 29, 2019
AMOS 6:1a, 4-7; PSALM 146; 1 TIMOTHY 6:6-19; LUKE 16:19-31

LEFTOVERS

Luke 16:19-31: *[Jesus said, "There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man's table; even the dogs would come and lick his sores. The poor man died and was carried away by the angels to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried. In Hades, where he was being tormented, he looked up and saw Abraham far away with Lazarus by his side. 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.' 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. 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.' He said, 'Then, father, I beg you to send him to my father's house-- for I have five brothers-- that he may warn them, so that they will not also come into this place of torment.' Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the prophets; they should listen to them.' He said, 'No, father Abraham; but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' 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.'"]*

My parents never throw away anything. That became readily apparent several years ago when my mom shipped a dozen boxes of my grandparents' china to Seattle. While the china was beautiful, we also knew we had no need (or room!) for it. So we tucked away the boxes in a corner of our garage, where they still rest today. Someday, we may pass all those boxes onto our daughter...better yet, maybe we'll give them to someone who will actually use those precious plates!

In all seriousness, I have always admired my parents for the ways they take care of things. Mom can turn remnants of fabric into beautiful quilts. Dad is the first one at church to volunteer to fix worn out pews or broken kneelers. Nothing goes to waste in their world. Not even food. Even now when I visit, their fridge is filled with leftovers. Mom loves to cook, but what I think she enjoys more is turning those meals into savory leftovers.

In this morning's gospel, Lazarus longs for those leftovers, too. Even the crumbs of food that find their way into the rich man's compost bin would be enough for Lazarus. ...and surely there must be something left from this man's table. After all, we are told the rich man feasts on fine wine and rich foods every day. Imagine going to Canlis day after day for weeks. Wouldn't you eventually bring something home to share for your neighbor?

But taking care of the leftovers is not the rich man's concern. And neither is taking care of his neighbor who lies at his gate. Only the dogs notice Lazarus. They are the only creatures who show up to soothe Lazarus. They, along with God, are the only ones who notice the goodness deep in the heart of Lazarus.

Once again, these lessons challenge us. At one level, the gospel sounds like a tale about the afterlife and what to expect after we die. But to focus there would be a distraction and would miss the finer points of the parable. This *is* a story about the consequences of people's actions. It is also a story about the present moment and the possibility and challenge of this life.

Jesus addresses this parable to the rich and powerful religious leaders of his day. Collectively, they were seen as "rich" of society. Many were also known as "lovers of money." When Jesus directs the parable to the Pharisees, he calls them to repent. Jesus

urges them to engage in the hard work of self-reflection and change. What do they love more: money or the people they are called to serve? How does their love help or hinder the common good?

The parable is also a plea. Jesus urges his fellow leaders to view the world through the critical eye of God rather than through their own lens of self-interest. Only then can they understand the suffering of their neighbors and how that suffering is brought on by economic and social injustices of their time.

Walter Bruggemann says that economics are a "core preoccupation" of the Bible.¹ That also means that money and material possessions are also core preoccupations of the Bible. Throughout scripture, God calls out economic systems that line the pockets of the rich by taking away from the poor. Any economy that extracts more than it creates is not reflective of God's desire for the world.

Starting with the Ten Commandments, the Bible reveals what's at the heart of God's divine economy. In God's house, love comes first. But not just any casual love. It is a generous love that is selfless and always looking out for the good of the other. Everyone has enough, because everyone is enough. Because there is always plenty, there is no need to lie, to hurt, or to steal.

One of Bruggemann's colleagues Richard Horsley says that "the Ten Commandments are not so much rules of morality as they are

¹Walter Bruggemann, *Money and Possessions*, (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2016), xix.

guidelines of social-economic relations among people.”² They exist to ensure the health of every human community. Living by the commandments means accepting one’s place and taking responsibility for the care of the whole community. To follow the commandments means to realize that unless everyone flourishes, no one can flourish. To participate in the divine economy means to recognize that we are all in this together, no matter what.

...and that’s what frustrates Jesus. If those ten best ways were followed, there would be no *need* at all among God’s people. No frightened people walled off in gated communities. No hungry people outside those gates. No fear that there would be enough. No fear that we would be enough. The Pharisees, the ones who should know this best, are the ones who are least able to practice it.

Jesus longs for all of his followers to be lovers of people. But to love God’s people means to be with them and to care about them. Countless times, Jesus has to cajole the leaders of the community to actually engage with the people they are called to serve. That’s why he tells them to heal with abandon on the Sabbath. That’s why the poor should be invited to the wedding banquet and seated in the place of honor.

During his life, the rich man never sees Lazarus. The rich man notices only after they

both die, and only then because Lazarus has something the rich man needs. Even in death, Lazarus remains just a tool to be used for the rich man’s personal comfort. The rich man is blind to their common need of each other. The chasm opens up only then, *after* rich man fails to acknowledge their interconnectedness and shared humanity. That chasm between them is the rich man’s doing, not God’s.

Those chasms continue today. Earlier this week, the *Seattle Times* reported that in 2018, the median family income in Seattle rose to almost \$94,000.³ Only San Francisco and San Jose experienced a greater increase. While those numbers are staggering, so is the disparity in income distribution among racial groups. While white people earned roughly \$105,000, black people earned only \$43,000. Those economic realities have consequences. Fifty years ago, 75% of the residents in the Central District were black. Today, only 15% of its residents are.⁴ Invisible walls keep going up all around us. Like the redline maps a hundred years ago, those walls continue to be built on a foundation of economic and racial injustice.

So what do we do? Last week, a new front door ministry began at Saint Mark’s. Twenty people from the Cathedral come during the week to welcome visitors into nave. Whether a person wants to pray, tour the Cathedral, or needs to use the restroom, people are now here to greet them. While this is a ministry of

²Ibid, xii.

³<https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/data/seattle-median-income-soars-to-93500-but-wealth-doesnt-reach-everyone-census-data-shows/>

⁴<https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/data/as-south-seattle-gentrifies-white-people-become-largest-racial-group/>

hospitality, it is also a ministry of visibility. It is one small way this community can show up to see and be with our neighbors. If you are interested in participating, talk to The Rev. Canon Pat Taylor or any of the other clergy. If this is not your thing, consider being a part of one of the feeding ministries at Saint Mark's, or engage in some other justice related ministry. Find out about structural economic challenges and their impact on

housing in this city. Just make sure you engage. Be willing to show up!

Lazarus reminds us that when no one else shows up, God is still there. God is always there caring and loving us. Lazarus is the only person named in all the parables. His name means "God helps." When no one else wants to help the leftovers, God will. In fact, its the leftovers who are God's favorites. What about you? Who's your favorite?



Saint Mark's Cathedral lives in a grounded faith and spirituality; we seek to liberate people for ministry. We are grounded in ancient Christian scripture and tradition while at the same time remaining open to the insight and truth of contemporary life. You'll find Saint Mark's Cathedral actively involved in service and outreach to our community. Together we pray, worship, study the scriptures, and explore the richness of twenty-one centuries of Christian experience. Wherever you are on your journey of faith, you are welcome here!