



One of the great strengths of the Episcopal Church is our understanding that questions are important if faith is to become belief which is then lived out every day in every circumstance we face. There are no stupid questions. What is important is that we engage with our faith, with the scripture, with what we see every day in our ordinary work, to determine what it means and how we are to respond.

To read scripture is only part of the goal. Simply reading today's meditation in Forward Day-by-Day lets us check the box that we have engaged in a spiritual discipline – but reading is the first, and not the last, step. Now, not every scripture or meditation demands that we immediately get up out of our pew and take some specific action. Indeed, some scripture needs to sit with us awhile – maybe even a long time. We may need time and reflection to understand what Jesus or the prophets were saying 2000 years ago in a context very different from our own – to enable us to see where and how it might be relevant to us today. To understand how our gifts and talents might be best used to help bring the realm of God closer to reality on earth. And, over our lifetime, we may come to understand a particular scripture in different ways and as calling forth different reactions from us and our community.

Jesus reminds us today of how blessed we are. Most of us are like the rich man – we live behind a gate (perhaps real and perhaps metaphorical) that insulates us, to a large degree, from the beggars of this world. But poor, sick, hungry, lame, beggars are here, even here, in Crawfordsville.

In fact, FISH, Food Finders, the HUB and other ministries we regularly support, are themselves crying out for funds as more and more people seek assistance – with electric bills from the hot days just past, for food because their pantry is empty because they have had no work for months. And months. And months.

There are many reasons that people seek assistance – and for most of us, supporting these ministries is primarily writing a check – a gate, if you will, that keeps us from close up and personal contact with those in need.

But our community has a Lazarus – that poor, hungry, sick, lame person – that we pass by and probably don't even see. You see what you expect to see – and if we are not used to looking for those in need among us, we may literally pass right by someone in need without consciously recognizing that person as someone in need.

Need may be obvious like someone whose pinched face tells us they are hungry.

Need may also not be so very obvious – for example the person we used to sit next to in the pew is no longer there every Sunday because they no longer drive. Perhaps they no longer hear as well as they used to and so miss much of what is said and therefore find themselves feeling cut-off.

According to Johann Metz,

“Faith gives Christians hope; however, it is faith that does justice that brings forth solutions to our problems since God works through human beings in creating the kingdom.”¹

Metz calls the church a moral institution but even more than that, the bearer of hope. The hope that our community may one day be a more just place where we don't walk by the beggar at the gate without stopping to see how we might respond to his needs. Where we offer salve for open wounds rather than letting the dogs lick the sores.

The rich man now sitting in Hades, or Hell, depending upon your translation, needs hope. He seems finally to have recognized that while he was oblivious to the suffering and needs of Lazarus during their respective lifetimes. There is the possibility of a different outcome for his brothers. Father Abraham, he pleads, please send Lazarus to them so that my five brothers have a chance for a different outcome. And Father Abraham replies: “If they will not listen to Moses and the prophets, they will not be convinced, not even if one rose from the dead.”

What will it take for the five brothers – and for us – to hear Moses and the prophets? Are we really better than the five brothers – we ignore even one raised from the dead who calls us to repent. Too often we, in fact, ignore the message of John the Baptist and Jesus himself.

Is coming to church enough? Probably not. That's a scary thought, isn't it?

But coming to church without changing your heart – without changing how you live your life, can be like the Pharisees praying in public so that others might see them and be impressed.

Ron Allen, one of my seminary professors, says that “In revealing God, Jesus reveals love, life, truth, sight, fullness and abundance. In making known these things, Jesus makes God known. ... Life, for instance, is not simply a matter of biology, but is the quality of existence that embodies the characteristics of heaven.”²

¹ <http://web02.gonzaga.edu/metz/hope.html> (September 23, 2010).

² Ronald J. Allen. *The Life of Jesus for Today* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 86.

What would Moses and the prophets have told the rich man and his five brothers if they were astute enough to listen? From Moses in Deuteronomy, chapter 15, where the command from the Lord through Moses to the people of Israel is to forgive debts every seventh year. It is accompanied by the structure to “not [to] be hard hearted or tight-fisted toward your neighbor... Give liberally and be ungrudging when you do ... and open your hand to the poor and needy neighbor in your land.”

From the prophets, particularly Micah in chapter 6: And what does the Lord require of you but to do justice and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God.

If these were the only two pronouncements from Moses and the prophets that the rich man and his five brothers heard – and understood – and lived, I think Jesus, through Father Abraham, is telling the rich man that he would not be sitting in Hades begging for a drop of water from the outstretched finger of Lazarus.

Perhaps you are like I am – there comes a point beyond which I am worn out by appeals for money to help this or that cause. The minute the ad comes on the TV screen or the pop up ad on the computer screen we click the remote or the mouse to get away from one more appeal for money to ease the suffering that I know exists but I also know is still going to be present tomorrow, and the next day, and the next. I don't want to be reminded of all the hurt in this world about which I can do so little – so I do nothing. Donor fatigue is a real issue – especially following the earthquakes, the refugees fleeing Syria, the mall shooting in Kenya and so on and so on and it just never stops. At some point we simply feel impotent to help and so we turn off our TV and turn off our computer and we zone out.

Jesus calls us to remain connected through listening to Moses and the prophets and Jesus. To the message that life at its best exemplifies what it is like in heaven – where all are cared for, where none are hungry, lame, poor or in need of dogs to lick their wounds. Where there is no gate separating us from others.

The rich man, clothed in purple and fine linen who dined sumptuously every day becomes the one who begs. The one who is dying for a drop of water. All because he was not willing to follow the teachings of Moses, the prophets and Jesus. And his five brothers will likely suffer the same fate. Destined to look across the chasm and see the poor, lame, hungry, beggar Lazarus held at the side of Abraham and cared for in ways never possible on earth.

Justice delayed is justice denied. The rich man is no longer rich. He who failed to ask questions regarding what Moses and the prophets called him to be and to do during his life is now condemned to a life where he pleads for a drop of water.

Elie Weisel said that the opposite of love is not hate but indifference. In responding to questions about what this means, a blogger stated that indifference means we are unconnected to those around us –and when we are unconnected we permit life to be wasted and destroyed.³ The rich man does not appear to be an evil man, in the sense of affirmatively and intentionally ignoring Lazarus lying at the gate of his house. His sin is the sin of indifference. An indifference that enabled the rich man to “look past” Lazarus, whose sores were licked by the dogs because no other medical care was offered.

The question Jesus offers up for us today is: where are we blind to what lies in front of us? Where are we indifferent to the needs of others? Yes, donor fatigue exists. Yes, the poor will always be with us. Even so, we are called to do what we can, when we can and how we can. One drop of water splashing across the rock over time wears away the underlying stone until a waterfall is created. We can be that one drop of water. We may never live to see the waterfall. But we can point the way for beauty to exist. We can show, by our actions, that faith overcomes indifference.

Ask these questions:

What are my gifts and talents? **Not money but skills and passions.**

Where can I offer what I already love to do to help those in our community that are in need?

Listen to Moses and the prophets and Jesus.

Listen and live – a life that is not simply a matter of biology.

It is a life which exhibits the quality of existence that embodies the characteristics of heaven.

Or, as Arianna Huffington wrote: live your eulogy not your resume.⁴

Don't let your eulogy be the first time people learn where you gave your heart and how you connected to family, friends and those in need.

The best life is when, as Frederick Beuchner said “your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet.”

A life which integrates love of and for God in how we actually live day to day is life that really is life.

And this kind of life, then, when it is time for the eulogy to be given, will have heads nodding and smiles coming as those hearing the eulogy will say, “yes, how true!”

Amen.

³ <http://answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20100821232243AA54HZn> (Sept. 23, 2010).

⁴ September 23, 2013. www.huffingtonpost.com/arianna-huffington/are-you-living-your-eulogy-or-your-resume_b_3936937.html.

19 Pentecost – Proper 21

Jeremiah 32:1-3a; 6-15; Psalm 91; 1 Timothy 6: 6-19; Luke 16: 19-31

September 29, 2013