

## **Teach Us To See**

Pentecost 16C, Luke 16:19-31

Sept 28, 2025

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Please rise to acknowledge that Jesus is here among us as we read his Word.

The Holy Gospel according to St Luke, the 16<sup>th</sup> Chapter.

***Glory to you, O Lord.***

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 lifted up his eyes 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.' The rich man said, 'Then I beg you, father, 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.' The rich man said, 'No, father Abraham, but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.' Abraham 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.' "

This is the Good News, the Gospel of our Lord.

**Praise to you, O Christ.**

*(Please be seated)*

If that story makes you squirm in discomfort, then here's more: The Gospel of Jesus is often unsettling. Jesus always calls us to a deeper, more rich expression of life that doesn't depend on our schemes to find comfort in wealth and power and status.

On the other hand, if that story makes you yearn for relief from your earthly suffering, we have good news: The Gospel of Jesus brings comfort to the afflicted. You are loved and you matter and the God who created you still sees you.

In today's parable, the rich man **didn't see or respond to Lazarus' need.**

Two nuggets for context:

- 1) This is not the same Lazarus, brother of Mary and Martha, whom Jesus raised from the dead. This one is a fictitious character for a teaching story, and he's the only time Jesus gave a name to a character in a parable. So the name must matter. Both Lazaruses are certainly examples of new life in God's promises. The name Lazarus means "the one whom God has helped."
- 2) Lutheran pastor & scholar Kendra Mohn informs us: the crowd hearing Jesus knew it was the expected role of wealthy people in the ancient world to help beggars. This was how the poor were fed. There was even a **bench** in front of wealthy homes to wait for assistance, and a beggar on the waiting bench could expect attention. While our modern society has

agencies & programs like food stamps, their societal process to get help was literally cemented in place with a bench. Today's Gospel says the rich man feasted every day, meaning he and his guests repeatedly, daily walked right on by, and overlooked these unwritten codes of honor as they ignored Lazarus and denied him the help he needed.

Today's Gospel is about seeing. Lord, teach us to see.

These days, we struggle knowing how to respond at interstate exit ramps when we see folks holding cardboard signs – a friend taught me to at least look a *person* in their eyes, smile, and acknowledge that you see them as a person.

These days we struggle as a society to decide which hoops to make someone jump through or which documents to show for us to decide if they're a good fit for our help.

Suffering is uncomfortable. But the allure of wealth's comfort can't shield us from the human bond that links us. As God's creations, we are all connected and when one suffers we all suffer.



*(picture slide)* My college recently installed a sculpture on campus called Homeless Jesus. I suspect they had today's Gospel reading in mind. He's waiting for help on a bench, in the cold snow. Would you stop to notice him? Lord, teach us to see you in the face of all who suffer.

It's easy to identify the human needs of poor Lazarus or homeless Jesus – needs for food & shelter & medical attention & companionship.

*(move to blank slide)*

We are left to wonder what needs for security and comfort the rich man was covering under his lavish food and clothing. And we must explore our own motivations to scheme and shield ourselves from vulnerable discomfort.

God is building a new Kingdom and proclaiming good news to the poor, release for the prisoners, sight for the blind and freedom for the oppressed.

What could God build anew through us, if we truly see our connection to our neighbors and all work together to address each others' needs? In a few minutes we'll get a glimpse of the possibilities when we all gather at God's feast, Holy Communion, the Great Thanksgiving, where all are welcome and loved and fed and sent to go out and call others to the table of God's extravagance. Come, taste and see.

Amen.