

A Rich Man's Heart

**September 24 and 25, 2022 / Sixteenth Sunday After Pentecost
Fourth in a Series of Sermons, A Heart From God / A Heart For People**

19 “There was a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. 20 And at his gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, 21 who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table. Moreover, even the dogs came and licked his sores.

Dear Friends in Christ

Today is the fourth in a series of four sermons focused on our Mission Statement, *A Heart From God / A Heart For People*.

- Last Sunday - *A Steward's Heart* - 1) Is generous with his Master's wealth, and 2) Is proactive in terms of making friends for Jesus for eternity
- Two Sundays Ago - *A Shepherd's Heart* 1) Aching for and searching for the lost, and 2) Celebrating and caring for the found
- Three Sundays Ago - *A Disciple's Heart* 1) Making hard choices, 2) Bearing assigned crosses, and 3) Renouncing our possessions
- Today - The Rich Man's Heart

The Hitchhiker

About 20 years ago, I was scheduled to lead a Bible class on the story of the Good Samaritan at 10 a.m. on a Tuesday morning. I had squeezed in a trip to the Rochester hospital - about 65 miles away, and as I came off Interstate 35 onto US Highway 14, there was a hitchhiker looking for a ride. He was a bearded and rugged looking kind of a guy, and he was headed in my direction. My first reaction was to not want to be late to my Bible class, and to drive on by. Which is exactly what I did. Did I mention our topic that day was the story of the priest and the levite driving on by the wounded man on the side of the road? My second reaction was to listen to my heart, and to do the right thing. I turned around, gave the man a ride, and if my memory serves me correctly, he was a lover of Jesus who was as grateful as he could be.

In today's Gospel lesson, the rich man is a lover not of Jesus, but of money and the happiness money can buy. The contrast is between a rich man without a name and a poor man whose name is written in the book of life. The rich man represents the

Pharisees who were refusing the call to repentance, and the poor man stands for all the outcasts of Jewish society who Jesus has made the special focus of his ministry.

The outline of our sermon has two parts - *Before death and After death.*

Before Death

Jesus says that “There was a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day.”

Wearing expensive clothing is one thing, but this man has taken it to an extreme. Wearing purple every day meant squeezing thousands upon thousands of little shellfish just to get enough dye to color one garment. This was labor insanity just to prove a point. It would be like wearing a jacket made out of \$100 bills. It doesn't keep you warmer, but everyone who sees it would know something about you.

Feasting is normally reserved for special occasions such as weddings or the visit of honored guests. To feast every day is to be out of control. This man was the poster boy for what Paul had warned Timothy about in today's Epistle. - **that those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction.**”

Of course the rich man's love of money and lack of generosity were only symptoms of his root problem. His main problem was that he would not use his ears to hear God's Word. He would not hear John the Baptist's call to repentance, and therefore he did not bear the fruits of repentance. He would not hear nor would he believe that Jesus was the Messiah, and as a result, the fruits of the Spirit like generosity were not evident.

Like many of the Pharisees, he may have been outwardly religious, but in the words of Jesus, his heart was far from Jesus. He may have fasted and prayed and tithed with the best of them...let me rephrase that, he may have fasted and prayed and contributed to the church with the best of them, but somehow he found a way to walk right on past a poor and a crippled beggar propped up against his gates. He may have even been grateful for his good fortune in life, but his gratefulness did not translate into generosity.

Before Death

Lazarus, who desperately depended on the generosity of others, was a poor man who counted dogs as his best friends.

Jesus pictures him as a beggar who had to rely on others' help for survival. He was crippled, perhaps from birth. He is cast at the gate of the rich man's house, where people come and go, in the hope that the rich man and his feasting friends will have pity on him and give him something from their table. Like the prodigal son, he longed to be satisfied with the humblest of food / crumbs from the rich man's table. But the rich man totally ignored him. Even though we learn in verse 24 that he knew Lazarus by name.

The situation is so pathetic that the household dogs, who would have received the crumbs from the table for which Lazarus longed, added to his humiliation by licking his sores.

One more time, Jesus would teach us this morning that things are not always as they seem. It took death, in this case, to reveal the blessedness of Lazarus, and to reveal the curse upon the rich man.

22 The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried, 23 and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. 24 And he called out, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame.' 25 But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish.

In this story, Lazarus represents the outcast of that society who were in fact welcomed by Jesus. The Pharisees were famous for grumbling about Jesus, who was famous for enjoying table fellowship with gluttons and drunkards and prostitutes. Lazarus represented all those that heard John the Baptist's call to change their ways, and they did so. They knew they were unworthy to be admitted into the kingdom, they threw themselves upon God's mercy, and as often as they did so, mercy was theirs.

Luke records Jesus lifting up his eyes on his disciples and declaring, "***Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you shall be satisfied. Blessed are you, who weep now, for you shall laugh.***

After Death, the rich man's heart still wasn't right with God.

When he asks father Abraham to have mercy on him, he still isn't asking for forgiveness. He's just asking for a little bit of water to relieve his suffering. When he asks Abraham to send Lazarus to help him, he is still not thinking of the needs of poor Lazarus, but of his own.

Abraham addresses him as a child, which is an expression of intimacy and genuine concern. He invites the rich man to remember what happened during their lifetime and how roles were now reversed. Now the rich man was being tormented and Lazarus comforted. Now it was plain for all to see that earthly wealth was not necessarily a sign of God's favor, nor was suffering a sign of His disfavor.

When the rich man pleads for someone for the dead to go warn his brothers about this place of torment, he still isn't apologizing for the error of his ways. He still isn't. He still isn't saying that Jesus is Lord. He still isn't believing that Jesus is the very Son of God, the Messiah, the Lamb of God that takes away the guilt of our sins, that takes away the power of our sins, that takes away the eternal consequences of our sins. He still isn't getting that faith comes from hearing and hearing from the Word of God. Instead, he's asking for yet one more miracle - that someone could rise from the dead and go warn his five brothers, lest they end up in this place of torment.

After death, Lazarus was carried by the angels to a place of honor at the heavenly banquet. The one whose name was written in the book of life now knew *that all's well that ends well*. No more hunger, no more thirst, no more infected sores and wounds, no more begging for a few crumb's from rich man's tables, no more living in treatment centers, half way homes, or on the streets.

Blessed was Lazarus for this simple reason - he had heard the Word of God and believed it / treasured it / kept it close / refused to let it go come hell or high water.

All's well that ends well. Story of one of my uncles who fought in World War II / he received awards for heroism in battle / struggled with a drinking problem for 50 years or so / through three marriages / my mom and aunt praying daily for him / occasional family conflict / drifted from church / lots of tears on my mom's part / at end of life / we ask a Concordia professor/pastor to visit my uncle, he receives communion, repents, celebrates God's forgiveness / all's well that ends well.

•Go Fund Me

Two prayers in closing today, as we ask God's Spirit to be constantly changing our hearts, that we would have a heart from him and a heart for others.

Prayer #1 is that God's Spirit would consistently turn our gratefulness for blessings received into generosity towards others.

Prayer #2 is that our generosity would be both/and instead of either/or. By that I mean that our generosity would be directed both at worthy causes in which we truly believe (local congregations, local homeless shelters, faraway Christian orphanages, for example), but also the hurting and the wounded and the broken-hearted sitting or hanging out nearby.

I close with a story of three farmers named Bud, Wayne, and Victor. They were three of several neighbors who showed up with bright red and green combines in September of 1968 to help my dad gather his harvest of grain. A few days earlier, my brother Curtis had been killed in a car accident, my family was hurting, we were wounded, we were the broken hearted Lazaruses living nearby. These friends did not walk by on the other side of the road, they showed up with grateful and generous hearts, they did what people in small towns and farming communities and churches do to this very day - they love God by loving their neighbors not just with words, but with deeds.

I tell you all of that so I can tell you this. Vic's son, David, was a classmate of mine. He's still the same age as I am, he's a grandpa now, happily married, retired in Arizona, he posts on Facebook that one of his grandsons has a tumor on his brain, grand mal seizures, unable to work, no income, chemo, radiation, 24/7 care needed. This 24 year old is one of the Lazaruses in my life. I can either walk on by, and continue to eat and drink and be merry, or I can help and befriend him, in the Name of Jesus. The point I'm now making - these days you're more likely to find the Lazaruses in your life on social media and on GoFundMe pages than you are sitting near your front gate.

The kingdom of God is like a congregation of believers who have their self-centered days, their good days, and their eyes-wide open days.

On their self-centered days, their hearts are turned in on their own agendas. They do all kinds of eating and drinking and being merry with little regard for the hurting, the wounded, and the folks nearby in crisis. They aren't really mean-

spirited people, but they have stumbled off onto the shoulder of the road called complacency.

On their good days, they confess their complacency to God and one another, and as often as they do so, the grace of God sweeps over their souls and rules in their hearts. They are dearly loved by their Savior, and their hearts ache especially for those who are in crisis through no fault of their own, but also for those whose injuries are mostly self-inflicted.

On their eyes wide open days, they go looking for worthy causes to support. They see every conversation as an opportunity to let their Gospel light shine. They know the value of getting the log out of their own eyes before they start going after the speck in their neighbors. They ask God each day for opportunities to listen well, and to know which of their neighbors most needs their love. In Jesus' Name. Amen.