

Luke 16:19-31  
St. Marks Episcopal Church – September 25, 2022  
16th Sunday after Pentacost – Proper 21C – Track 2  
William H. Grow, Jr.

## We Are Our Brother's Keeper

All of today's readings provide a warning to the rich man. The old testament reading, Amos 6 starts with, "Alas for those who are at ease in Zion, and for those who feel secure on mount Samaria, Alas for those who lie on beds of ivory and lounge on their couches and eat lambs from the flock, and calves from the stall ..... and the Epistle, 1 Timothy 6: 9-10 "But those who want to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains. And then we get to the Gospel.

All of these passages go into something we would rather not think about or discuss: the use of money and its role in our lives. Now, we know that this is not you or I. Most of us do not consider ourselves to be rich. However, by world standards, we, as a people, would be considered to be rich. This piqued my interest, so I looked some things up on the internet. The numbers are all over the place and depend on how you phrase your question, but the bottom line is that we are rich. According to one source, more than a third of the world population lives on less than \$2.00 a day.

I doubt that any of us identify as being rich and would find it hard to identify with the rich man in the parable in the Gospel. However, I read that, "if you have more than one pair of shoes, more than one pair of underwear and more than one meal a day, you are rich. By North American standards, if we live above the official poverty line, we are a part of the over-consumer class. If we order an extra pair of boots from the L.L. Bean catalog, we are rich. If we make purchases from the Victoria's Secret catalog, we are rich. If we have time to call in and make purchases from the Home Shopping Network, we are rich. If we are able to have breakfast, lunch, and dinner, we are rich like the man in the story.

Doors can keep people out or trap people inside or just be a barrier in general, making it difficult to get in or out. Lazarus is at the closed door of the rich man and he is barely noticed by the rich man as he comes and goes on his daily rounds. Not only are the physical doors a barrier to Lazarus but so are the doors or shades on the rich man's eyes that do not let him see the poor and needy. But, the doors don't

have to be a barrier. They can be a portal to connect us to the hungry or oppressed or otherwise needy among us, in our town or in our neighborhood.

So, it might be easy for us to feel self-righteous about the rich man and it might be easy to think that this parable is not hard to understand. The rich man had more than he needed and didn't share, so he went to Hades. The poor man suffered on earth and was rewarded in heaven. The rich man got his comeuppance. Right? Obviously this is a lesson for rich people. So, we are through and can go home now feeling good about ourselves. Right?

Not so fast Abernathy! (I am not sure where I picked that phrase up, probably an Abbot and Costello skit or some other old time comedy show, but I have always liked it, and I just got to use it.) Not so fast Abernathy! As stated earlier, we could all be considered to be rich by world standards. Perhaps this parable is not just for the super rich. Maybe we also have to take heed.

Now, this is a parable, a fictional story. But we sometimes try to see ourselves in some of Jesus' parables. For example, most of us would probably identify ourselves as the Good Samaritan in that parable. Who do we identify with in this parable? Are we Lazarus? I don't think so. We may want something, but we are probably not in want of basic needs. Are we the rich man? I think not, even though we may have more material possessions than we need. I am pretty sure we are not Abraham. So, who might we be? I think we are the brothers of the rich man whom he wants to warn and save from the horror of being separated from God. We are the ones that need to learn from the rich man, even though most of us aren't filthy rich and many of us actually do some form of ministry work with the poor and disenfranchised. We need to be aware and compassionate.

We have seen all the signs we need to see. We have the Word and we have Jesus Christ, the one man that came back from the dead in order to save us. All we need to do is follow His guidance. Love one another as we love ourselves. Not just our friends. Not just the people next door. We need to include those who are on the fringes of society. The homeless; the poor; the sick and the outcasts that need our love and compassion to feel they are worthwhile.

All of our passages today remind us that those in need are our responsibility. I think God expects us to care for those who are less fortunate or down on their luck. Many times people lose their jobs, homes or end in financial straits through no fault of their own. "There, but for the grace of God, go I."

Let me finish with this piece of advice I read. “Life lived only for the self and for acquisitions becomes boring and empty. Life lived for others becomes enriched. May we all “take hold of the life that is really life” by paying attention to those we see daily, to those it would be easy to ignore. May we look at them and share with them before it is too late. Above all, may we hear the words of Jesus and respond to his call as he reveals to us the loving heart of God.”

Amen