

19*“There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. 20And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, 21who longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man’s table; even the dogs would come and lick his sores. 22The poor man died and was carried away by the angels to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried. 23In Hades, where he was being tormented, he looked up and saw Abraham far away with Lazarus by his side. 24He 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.’ 25But 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. 26Besides 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.’ 27He said, ‘Then, father, I beg you to send him to my father’s house— 28for I have five brothers—that he may warn them, so that they will not also come into this place of torment.’ 29Abraham replied, ‘They have Moses and the prophets; they should listen to them.’ 30He said, ‘No, father Abraham; but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’ 31He 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.’”*

If you were Jesus and you wanted to get your attention this morning what would you do? If you were Jesus and you wanted to get through to this preacher and this congregation today, what would you do? If you were Jesus and loved the people in this room more than you loved your own life what would you want to communicate to us? If you saw us marring and injuring our own souls by the choices we make each day what would you want to tell us and teach us?

Today Jesus tells us a story. He wanted to get our attention through this story so we will take this story into our hearts and into our lives and be changed by it. Every one of us needs to hear this story and to be challenged by this story.

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A rich man enjoying the wealth that God had given him – a feast every day. A poor man named Lazarus lying at the rich man’s gate. The rich man passed him every time he left his house and every time he returned. But the poor man, Lazarus, was never invited in – not even offered the scraps from the dumpster.

Now the first thing we can be sure of is that we are neither of these two people - not the wealthiest of the wealthy nor the poorest of the poor. When it comes to food we are all more like the rich man than we are like Lazarus. And when it comes to walking on by and never really seeing or relating to one who is suffering we may be like the rich man as well.

Lazarus died and was carried away by the angels to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried. In Jesus' story the rich man suffers in the life to come – the poor man is blessed. The rich man asks for just a drop of water on his tongue but receives nothing. He asks for someone to be sent to his family still living on earth to warn them. He is told it would do no good.

Now what does Jesus want us to think and do as we hear this story?

Maybe he wants us to feel guilty about what we have so that we will write a check to feed hungry people. Or maybe he wants us to worry about going to hell so we will try to please Jesus more. Or maybe if you or I are the suffering one, maybe Jesus wants us to have confidence that in eternal life God will take care of us. This is the tricky part of about hearing the stories Jesus tells: we do not always know how Jesus wants to change us through these stories. Sharing with the hungry is a good thing. Seeking to please Jesus is a good thing. Having confidence that God will be blessing us with eternal life is a good thing.

But I would like to suggest another response to this story. Think about the people you just walk by. You may not even be seeing them. Think about the people you write off – that you have given up any hope for. It may be someone at work. It may be whole groups of people that you and I do not really think of as people. It may even be a member of this church or of your family. How might you stop at the gate and speak to this Lazarus? How will you be changed if you do?

Next week you will have the opportunity to buy things that have been made by women in Africa. Your purchases will help them to feed their families and to pay for medical care. It is a simple way for you to offer someone who is not invited into the feasts we share. The women who benefit will be grateful and you will have some

things that you like. All of that is good. But think of how much better it would be if you could somehow know these women and share laughter and tears –hear their wisdom and learn from them. Maybe someday we will find a way to make that happen.

Closer to home there are opportunities. Love, Inc. needs volunteers to answer the phone when people who are seeking help call with their requests. Birthright needs volunteers to serve the women who come there seeking clothing for themselves and for their children and other supplies for their newborns. The Friend to Friend program needs men and women to visit those who are in prison – to just be a friend who will visit and write regularly. Haven house needs you to take food and to serve a meal for those who are homeless in Lorain. And in this congregation and on your street are people facing illness who could use a meal and a listening ear or some rides to the doctor.

I could go on and on. Jesus told this story to challenge you and me to change. Jesus told this story so that we might see those who have become invisible. Jesus told this story to scare us into sharing and love.

Do you think it will work? Amen.