

First Reading: Amos 6:1a, 4-7

Psalm: Psalm 146

Second Reading: 1 Timothy 6:6-19

Gospel: Luke 16:19-31

[Jesus said:] 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.’”

Like many parents my age, a lot of what I’ve learned about parenting - from strategies to combat picky eating, to safe sleep protocols for babies, to how to manage toddler temper tantrums - has come from Instagram. This past week, Dr. Becky, a psychologist who works with parents and children and author of the recently released book Good Inside, told about her reaction to a piece of art her daughter had just painted and said, “Mom! Look

what I just did!” She held up this really quite good painting of a blue sky with a sun shining and a rainbow - it was pretty impressive - and she talked about how she isn’t going to respond to her daughter by saying “Good Job!” or “that’s awesome!” because she desires to teach her children to be resilient people who trust themselves.

“Of course you can say those things to your kid,” she says, “but a part of parenting is setting them up for their whole lives, so say in the future my daughter does an art project or writes an essay, I don’t want her to immediately look outside herself to say, “okay, who’s going to tell me that it’s good.” I want her to be able to look inward and say, “what do I think?” If I want my daughter to grow up to trust herself and to look inward for validation in the future I need to start that wiring now. Instead of saying ‘good job’ a response that teaches her to look outside of herself for validation after making art, or writing an essay, or anything else, I might say, “tell me about it.” or “how did you think to make that?” or “What’s

your favorite part?” Because that’s what will help to build resilience in the long run.

This idea has been sticking with me all week, not only in how I think about parenting, but also as a practice of faith. Where do you look for validation as a person of faith?

Today, as we continue through the series of stories in the Gospel of Luke, we hear another challenging story from Jesus about a rich man - continuing to reinforce the theme of economic generosity that is at the heart of Luke’s Gospel. At first pass, it may seem that this story is a lesson about how our economic location affects where we end up in the afterlife. However, focusing on the afterlife distracts us from what I would argue is the more important teaching - how we live our lives and practice our faith here and now.

The rich man lives what appears to be a good life - a life some of us also live, and life many of us hope all people have the luxury to live - a life of plenty, of having nice things, of not ever being hungry, of enjoying the pleasures of comfort. From the outside looking in, it is clear this rich man has been lifted up as someone doing a “good job” at life. For wealth has been a sign of virtue throughout the ages.

Lazarus, in contrast, does not have that outward validation in the same way. He seems to live a very hard life, a life of pain and suffering, a life in which his choice in daily activities are limited due to health issues, lack of resources, and the whims of those who have plenty.

Lazarus lives a life dependent on the wealthy to do the right thing. Sitting outside the gate of this rich man wasn't an uncommon occurrence for people who didn't have what they needed, in fact, it was the only way that someone like Lazarus would survive.

Kendra Mohn, Lead Pastor at Trinity Lutheran Church in Fort Worth, TX notes that “Often there was a bench outside homes where the poor could wait for assistance. A beggar who sat on this bench at the gate could expect some sort of attention, especially from a feasting host and guests.” She continues, “Those waiting benches are still present in the excavated site of Pompeii outside the large homes of the wealthy, a reminder of the established practice and the rich man’s neglect.”

“The established practice and the rich man’s neglect.”

Many scholars suggest that the rich man was so distracted by his wealth, by his life of comfort and delicacies that he didn’t see Lazarus. He may have noticed him - we don’t know whether his neglect was intentional or not - but he definitely didn’t see him. As Debbie Thomas writes in her essay on this text from 2019, “To see is to risk the vulnerability of relationship. Of kinship. Of solidarity. To see is to put aside forever all questions of

worthiness, and recognize in the bleeding Other my own face, my own fractured dignity, my own pain, my own mortality. To see as Jesus sees is to implicate myself fully in the stories of other people's hunger, illness, terror, and shame.”

The rich man's internal validation came from outside of himself - from his fine clothes and lavish meals. It didn't come from within, it wasn't grounded in a sense of himself or his inherent goodness and it limited his ability to be in genuine community with others.

Perhaps this distraction is what Paul refers to when he says that “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 us, as people who claim God's promises and follow Jesus, looking inward isn't simply about trusting ourselves, but it's about grounding ourselves in God's promises. Promises made to us in

our baptism, that we'll hear and proclaim again today for baby Hudson. Promises that ultimately compel us back outside of ourselves to truly see each other. To recognize that we belong to each other, that our lives are intricately connected to one another.

Who is it hard for you to see, recognize as your kin? What gets in your way? What is it for you that centers you on yourself rather than on God's promises and ultimately on your connection to others?

Maybe for you, like the rich man in our story, it is also wealth or the accumulation of things. Perhaps it's climbing the proverbial ladder of achievement, being the most virtuous in your social justice pursuits, or something else altogether - I'm guessing you have a hunch as to what it is for you.

So today, and everyday, may you hear the promise of your baptism and God's unshakable love loud and clear. May that be

the place in which you find your ground and your meaning and your purpose.

Grounded in those promises, we are able to know and to recognize that our lives are all deeply connected. That we belong to each other, not only here within this congregational community but within our neighborhoods, at our workplaces, across political divides, and beyond state or national borders. We are all bound together - whether we like it or not. May we be brave enough to truly see each other. Amen.