

Series: Give Up!

Sermon: Give Up Attachments

Luke 16:19-31 (NIV)

“There once was a rich man, expensively dressed in the latest fashions, wasting his days in conspicuous consumption. A poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, had been dumped on his doorstep. All he lived for was to get a meal from scraps off the rich man’s table. His best friends were the dogs who came and licked his sores.

22-24 “Then he died, this poor man, and was taken up by the angels to the lap of Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried. In hell and in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham in the distance and Lazarus in his lap. He called out, ‘Father Abraham, mercy! Have mercy! Send Lazarus to dip his finger in water to cool my tongue. I’m in agony in this fire.’

25-26 “But Abraham said, ‘Child, remember that in your lifetime you got the good things and Lazarus the bad things. It’s not like that here. Here he’s consoled and you’re tormented. Besides, in all these matters there is a huge chasm set between us so that no one can go from us to you even if he wanted to, nor can anyone cross over from you to us.’

27-28 “The rich man said, ‘Then let me ask you, Father: Send him to the house of my father where I have five brothers, so he can tell them the score and warn them so they won’t end up here in this place of torment.’

29 “Abraham answered, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets to tell them the score. Let them listen to them.’

30 “‘I know, Father Abraham,’ he said, ‘but they’re not listening. If someone came back to them from the dead, they would change their ways.’

31 “Abraham replied, ‘If they won’t listen to Moses and the Prophets, they’re not going to be convinced by someone who rises from the dead.’”

Sermon

It is Spring Cleaning Time - or at least it was at the Benischek house this past week. 72 degrees and sunny, its time to air out the ol’ house. It’s been years since we’ve had a garage sale, so we’re going through our stuff, box by box, shelf by shelf, seeing what it is that we need to keep, and what we need to get rid of. The Bible is true, there is a time to keep, and a time to throw away. The kids are getting older, and they don’t use a lot of their stuff that they had in their past. We are looking at boxes that we haven’t opened in three moves. How bad do we still want to keep this extra toaster? Things that were once so important are now seen in a different light. There are things I don’t want to get rid of because we spent so much money to get it, even though I don’t need it or want it now, I keep it, because I don’t want to admit that it might have been money down the drain. Or maybe I need to understand that this object outlived its usefulness, no longer brings me joy, as Mari Kondo says, and its time for us to part. But I don’t want to part. My stuff, my knickknacks, they are a part of me. We become hoarders of something. It’s easy for me to donate my kids stuff (not the important stuff), but you can’t keep everything - but then my kids ask, Dad, you’re keeping your giant box of baseball cards, really? Even around here, we’ve done a little spring cleaning, getting rid of a few items that have just been in storage for decades? And there are something peaceful and cleansing about the process.

Everything in life changes. Theres a time to be born and a time to die. A time to keep things and a time to throw things away, saith the Bible. And the more we try to cling to things, the more we put our value in things that rust, or moths destroy, the less value you place on yourself. Just yourself. I want you to have things, we all

need our stuff - but stuff is temporary. Ownership is an illusion. Let me break it down for you like this: And this, this is going to sound depressing. Nothing in life is yours to keep. Everything you have will not be yours someday. And many of the things you treasure, the next generation won't treasure it as much. We had that walk thru the house with Grandma moment one day. She was doing that "What do you want when I'm gone" kinda checklist. I could imagine that she thought that there would be fights over the furniture, or tableware, or wall hangings, you name it. But it was really the opposite. No one really wanted the chair, or the pictures of family that you remember, but no one else does. This is an estate sale waiting to happen. And my kids will do the same with us someday. Nothing in life is yours to keep. Not your stuff. Not even your children, family, friends, Someday, you will leave them all behind. My hope and my belief is that we see each other on the other side, and we become ONE with God. Even our bodies won't last - for some of us that's a good thing, I'm ready for an upgrade. But someday, I'll stand before my creator without my stuff, and will God find value in me, just me, or will I be as Daniel says, "weighed on the scales and found wanting." God doesn't care about my stuff. He cares about me. I don't care about Grandma's stuff. I care about grandma.

I lift up to you a parable that Jesus shared with Disciples and Pharisees who were also listening in. It is the only parable that Jesus shared that had names to go with the characters. Some have concluded that it might be based on real people, folks that the audience maybe knew. There probably was a Lazarus, and everyone probably knew the rich man to whom Jesus referenced. Sometimes he's called Davies, which is Latin for Rich Man - but it's not his real name. It's probably telling that the rich guy doesn't get a name in the story but the beggar does - showing who might be more important in the tale. Lazarus's name means, "God Helps". Fitting for him. The parable begins by calling attention to the fact that often life isn't fair. Some people are born into such harsh situations, that — try as they may — they will never escape a life of great suffering. Poor, homeless, hungry, diseased Lazarus represents people for whom life in this world simply isn't fair. If there is to be any hope for their life on earth, it will be found if others offer help. They cannot, on their own, escape their impoverishment. We don't need to limit this reflection upon life's unfairness to only economic conditions. Some people are born into families where they never get the basic love and nurture that every child deserves. Some people are born with a set of genes that will make it difficult for them to be successful at much of anything in life. Some people's brain chemistry will mean they will fight mental health issues of which others will have little understanding, or empathy, or patience. Sometimes life isn't fair.

And then there is the rich man. He represents the other end of the spectrum. He dressed in purple linen – the color of royalty. He "feasted sumptuously every day." The guy's got it made. Whether he worked hard for it or it dropped in his lap, we don't know, and it doesn't matter. The question remains: How do we measure the significance of a person's life?

By the common standards of the world, the rich man would have been seen as having lived a significant life. Then, and to a large extent now, wealth was seen as a sign of God's favor. It's safe to assume that the rich man lived a moral life as commonly understood. He didn't cheat on his wife, he didn't lie or steal. He probably kept the Sabbath, attending weekly services, and made an effort to keep the Torah, giving a tenth of his considerable income to the synagogue. He would have been thought of as being a "good man" – his name would have been known far and wide - just as we can name a few names of people of significant wealth.

Lazarus, in contrast, would have been seen as a totally insignificant person in the community. The eyes of God never lose sight of Lazarus in his suffering. The poor man died and was carried away by the angels to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried. Death is the great equalizer. Kings on thrones and people living in the streets both must face death. In a strange way, death binds us all together, if we could only see it that way. You and I might seem to have very little in common, but one very big thing every two people on the face of the earth share if the inevitability of their eventual death.

In all likelihood Lazarus wasn't buried at all but thrown out into the wilderness. The potters grave. The rich

man surely had a grand funeral with lots of good things said about him, but he wasn't there to hear them. And then we get the switcharoo. In Hades, where he was being tormented, the rich guy looked up and saw Abraham far away with Lazarus by his side and asked for a drip of water. With death comes the final reckoning – the rendering of the true significance of the two men's lives. The implication is that the seemingly admirable life of the rich man didn't amount to a hill of beans. It was all for show. The single fact of his life by which he is being judged is that he had no compassion on Lazarus who was there day after day in plain view at his doorstep. Consistently in the Gospels, and especially in Luke's Gospel, wealth is seen as a dangerous thing to the health of a soul. Being rich need not be a bad thing. Indeed, it can be a very good thing. It can put a person in a position to do a whole lot of good and helpful things in this world. But the love of money can lead us astray and make us blind to what is truly important.

This is a very hard parable to hear, isn't it? Most of us wouldn't think of ourselves as poor. We aren't rich either, but our condition in life is closer to that of the rich man than of poor Lazarus living in the streets with wild dogs licking his sores. And all of us know that there have been plenty of times we have passed by someone in need and done nothing to help. How often have we seen someone suffering, and refused to let their pain into our hearts? The parable is humbling for all of us.

The Torah is full of commandments to care for the poor and the stranger. The prophets were continually calling the leaders to account for neglecting the poor. As Luke sees it, what Jesus is teaching is nothing new. It has always been there in the sacred scripture of the Old Testament if people were willing to hear it. God put us on this earth to care for one another – and that includes everybody. No exceptions.

One thing that stood out to me this week when I was pondering the sermon. The rich man certainly had his views of which rung he stood on in the social ladder, and he knew where Lazarus stood. And in the afterlife, when Lazarus and Davies switched places of worth and value, the rich guy still didn't buy it. "Abraham, you go and tell Lazarus to get me some water, even just a drop. You get him to do that for me. I need him to serve me. I'm still the better man that he is." To him Lazarus is still just a beggar, an errand boy, someone to boss around. But the chasm doesn't allow it.

Life is a journey of letting go that prepares us to enter into a realm of indescribable love. We have to let go of everything within us that stands in the way of love. At the end of the parable, it is little gestures of kindness that stand out. Little things like someone offering a cool cup of water to a person with a parched throat, or that bit of advice to help someone understand, or helping someone along in their education. Or help when the floodwaters come. Or letting others enjoy the same rights and privileges that you enjoy.

Let go of your attachments. Don't be clingy. Clinging comes from fear, fear of losing or not controlling. So love yourself, your life, your spouse, your children, your work, your friends - but don't cling to them. Nothing in life is yours to keep. Not your stuff. Not even your children, family, friends, Someday, you will leave them all behind. And we can do so with grace and in peace - for God can see the value of us, of you - without your stuff. And our reward is far better than anything we can possess on earth. And the family of God said, AMEN.