



ST. LUKE IN THE FIELDS
CELEBRATING 200 YEARS

“THE BLESSING OF GIVING”:
16TH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST
11:15 SERVICE

AMOS 6: 1A, 4-7
PSALM 146
1 TIMOTHY 6: 6-19
LUKE 16: 19-31

A SERMON BY THE REV. CAROLINE STACEY
SEPTEMBER 25, 2022

My late mother used to say that hell would be seeing what you didn't do in life. She didn't believe in physical punishment, she believed that the emotional pain of seeing your whole life laid out before you, seeing the things you did but wish you hadn't, worse - the things you *didn't* do that you wish you had - this would feel like hell. Leaving aside the judgment aspects of this parable, the rich man faces exactly this situation. He sees in the next life the results of what he didn't do in this one.

Lazarus is the only person Jesus names in any of his parables. Lazarus means "God helps". The rich man is sometimes called "Dives", which is simply Latin for "rich". His wealth defines him and it limits him. However the things we might imagine are his besetting issues - greed, gluttony, pride - whatever other "seven deadly sins" we project into his life - those are not the things that truly harm his soul. It is what he *doesn't* do that he regrets.

*... Between you and us a great chasm has been fixed...*says Abraham. The irony upon irony is that any day of his life, the rich man could have bridged that chasm between his abundance and Lazarus' poverty. But now it is too late, and there really is a fixed chasm. Maybe the rich man thought to himself, very humanly: "I am not *really* rich. I am not nearly as well off as Mr. Ahaz in the next town over. His vineyards are twice as big as mine and he has three times

as many servants. And if I feed this person, all the poor will come to my gate day after day and then where will I be? Where will my responsibility end? Am I to take care of all the needy in town?..."

Yet the choice Jesus presents in this parable is not about solving for all the poverty and social inequality in ancient Israel, only Lazarus at his gate. How often do we think of economic inequality as a fixed reality, a chasm that is a given, when in fact if each of us helped one neighbor at our gate, the world might be quite different? The rich man could have reflected: I wonder if Mr. Ahaz and I can get together and create a community assistance program for Lazarus and others in both our towns?

We might also want to reflect on where *we* are in this parable. I see us in the five brothers. The rich man urges us to think carefully about our choices in how we use what we have, or fail to use it.

Today is stewardship Sunday. One moral of this parable is obvious: Don't be a Dives! But there is more. Stewardship Sunday reminds us of the joy and privilege of giving. Abraham is the one who entertained angels unawares in showing hospitality to strangers. If the rich man had delved deeply into his own Abrahamic faith tradition, he would have understood that giving is a spiritual opportunity to bless others, sometimes people we don't know and in ways we will never fully know. Giving is part of God's image in us. No wonder it gives us joy. We are made that way. God builds in

us God's own capacity to bless others through what God has given us. Giving is a powerful part of being human, of being in relationship. The rich man misses out on this.

Stewardship at its simplest level, is sharing. Stewardship is a way of life born of thinking about what we have in a relational way. Who has God created me to be? What gifts have I been given? Then we look around. Our first question might be: Who is at my gate? What are the needs around me? Then we might ask: how can we help most effectively, not only for today but also for tomorrow? These are the stewardship questions facing St. Luke's now. The leadership team at St. Luke's is exploring big, hopeful dreams these days.

Some long-time parishioners will remember the days not so long ago when we were literally pledging to keep the lights on. That was an enormous struggle because we are responsible for this whole block, with all its properties and back then they all needed fixing up. We did a very heavy real estate lift on several fronts and I am glad we did it when we did. We certainly don't have unlimited resources but we have gone from hanging on by our fingernails to finding ourselves in a rather different position. Now we face other temptations and struggles. It can be tempting to simply sit on and grow our endowment, to try and become as secure against future disasters as we could possibly be in this uncertain world. The

question we are asking and wrestling with now is: what is the right balance between prudent security for the future and feasible mission now, investing in new ventures that will be a blessing for the whole community?

Many of us in leadership believe that God calls us to share the blessings we have received at St. Luke's in new ways. Therefore, we are now exploring if, when and how we can build a mission building to expand our outreach and hospitality to others, as well as serve the congregation. We want to serve the needs, material and spiritual, of many for generations. We want to have a place for the elderly, the lonely, and the hungry to share a community meal. We want to offer greater spiritual support through spiritual direction and through classes. We want to expand our fantastic Thrift Shop in purpose-built space on Christopher Street to make affordable clothing and other essentials available to the community. We want to offer hospitality for funeral receptions for grieving families and for outreach and community events when school is in session – which now we have no space of our own to do – through a new flexible gathering space seating 150, with a commercial grade kitchen.

In discerning this path forward to new mission, I want to be clear that every dollar you and I pledge to the church today brings this

dream closer. Choices around money are important in Jesus' teaching, as today's parable illustrates. Choices around money are central to a faithful life. We promise as Christians to work, pray and give for the spread of the kingdom of God and our parish church is the front line of spreading the gospel. We are the local outpost of the kingdom of God. How this theology meets our parish's work today is that every dollar you and I pledge for operations means we can invest more of the rental income streams for mission. Pledges are still needed from all of us to balance the budget, yet in pledging we are also giving toward a greater vision. Perfect conditions never come, and so it always going to be the art of the possible. But every dollar we pledge brings that missional vision closer. So please be as generous as you can in your pledging this year.

The Lord has great things in store for us. God has brought us so far on the road. Let us open our hands to receive God's blessing in Bread and Wine and to be God's blessing in the world.

AMEN

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