

Sunday closest to September 28

Proper 21
Year C
RCL

[Amos 6:1a,4-7](#)

[Psalm 146](#)

[1 Timothy 6:6-19](#)

[Luke 16:19-31](#)

The chasm existed between the rich man and Lazarus long before they both died. The unnamed rich man feasted every day in his fine linen and royal purple, while the man named Lazarus could only dream of eating what fell off the rich man's table. The rich man, lived in his palace, covered with all the fine things of life; Lazarus was covered with sores. Not only did Lazarus sit outside of the rich man's house, by the gate, but he died there as well. The rich man also died. Both men found themselves in the afterlife, but in a total reversal of their roles, the rich man found himself begging for relief, while Abraham comforted Lazarus. Only Luke offers us this vivid, startling parable- a possible warning to us all about what happens when we don't recognize who or what is in front of us.

Why did the rich man go to Hades? Why was he punished? This is certainly one of those parables where we're invited in to engage, to question, to wonder. Is it because he was rich? Certainly, the kingdom of God for Luke meant that everything: power, privilege, wealth, would be turned upside down, reversed. This parable certainly fits with that theme.

Another possibility is that those who hear this parable remember the value that the rich man couldn't in time: that God wants us to recognize and acknowledge the other while we're on this earth- and to take that a step further when we have the means to respond, respond. The rich man never seemed to see Lazarus, in life or in death.

In nature, a chasm is a deep fissure in the earth or some other substance. In relationship, a chasm can be a profound difference between viewpoints. Often deep, looking over the edge of a chasm can bring fear to those among us who might be afraid of heights, or even bring us the fear of what would happen to us if we fell into the unknown darkness. Looking over the edge into brokenness and darkness can be terrifying to even the most brave. So why look?

Because the truth is we can't un-see something when we've seen it. Certainly our memories can shift, but once we see something that affects our spirits and hearts that demands of God's justice, it's hard to look away. Once we look over the edge into the chasm, and recognize the need and the brokenness, we can't forget. We've had a number of wake-up calls just in the past few months that show us how deep the chasms of broken relationships, of inequality, of immense violence, of racism, and more that show how many people are truly hurting.

The good news is that unlike this parable, for us in the here and now, it's never too late to bridge that chasm. I'm reminded of the hymn that begins: "there's a wideness in God's mercy, like the wideness in the sea." For just as big as the fissure is, God transforms and heals it. With endurance, patience, generosity and gentleness we can cross it. Build a bridge. Traverse dangerous sections. If, even we just do one thing, we can make the gap smaller. And we can get past this separation built by us, by our culture, by our disrespect for others because Jesus guides us how to do it. To enter into godliness is to set our hopes in God, to be generous and ready to share, and to actively engage in listening to God in prayer of how to heal this spiritual brokenness in our world.

This passage is very much like a spiritual tune-up for us. Think about it, when you're about to go on a long car trip, you do a tune-up on your car. Check the oil, the windshield washer fluid, fill it up with gas, make sure the tires are appropriately filled with air, etc. There will be a lot of wear and tear put on this vehicle in its trip, and it must be prepared to handle whatever may come its way on the road. We know it is the same for our journeys in our spiritual lives. Day in and day out we're drawn into relationship, into the world around us. These readings remind us time and time again that we are created in the image of God, bearers of the heavenly treasure, even though there are still many among us who the world does

not see fit to be worthy of these treasures. And we need to continually soften and prepare our hearts to receive and to share.

Lately, it feels like we're on different sides of a very large chasm, and that it's growing larger by the minute. When we look up at one another, especially those we disagree with, it can seem like we are very far away from each other. God is among us though; God is working to unite us to one another. We are closer than we appear.

When we envision the world today, we know there are huge problems that our brothers and sisters are facing every day. The systemic changes needed in our world today are massive. How do we each examine what might be causing chasms to widen in our own hearts, in our own spiritual lives? This is not easy work. Just as Deacon Wib preached last week by turning to the heart beat of God, we may find ourselves in uncomfortable situations. To examine our own heart isn't always comfortable. To sit in silence with God, to ask God to be our own heart beat is difficult.

Because, how could the rich man not notice? And surely if someone went back to tell his brothers they'd begin to notice, too, right? The separation and disconnect clearly existed. Most of us don't need more signs; we need more open hearts to realize that God is showing us all the time, inviting us into this transformative work of love and grace. The chasm has existed long before any of us were born. But we don't have to help it grow.