

This week, we continue our Lukan journey with the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus.

Note that only one of these men have a name. It's not the rich guy. We may have given him a name in Latin – Dives – but that just means “rich guy” so, he's anonymous. The poor guy is the one with a name – Lazarus.

Names are important today, but they were even more so back in the day. Having a name meant that you belonged to someone. Someone had to have named you. The first power that God gave Adam was the ability to name the creatures on earth. To have a name means that you are somebody. The rich man has no name. He may think he's somebody, but he's not who he thinks he is.

The rich man has defined himself by what he has. He has a beautiful house. He has an entourage. He has plenty of money. He has servants that do his bidding. He has made for himself a good life, from his perspective.

What the rich man lacks is the ability to see things from a different perspective.

He can't see things from Lazarus' perspective. He can't see them because he isn't

willing to acknowledge that most of the world doesn't live the way he lives. He can't see what's right at his doorstep. He doesn't know how to look beyond the end of his upturned nose.

Lazarus sees him, though. Lazarus sees him pass by every day.

Lazarus looks up also. From his perspective, life is quite amazing. People have plenty to eat. They have friends around them. They have beautiful clothes.

Lazarus would be happy with a fraction of what he sees. What he gets is ignored.

And, then, down comes the great leveler. Death.

In the parable, the tables are turned. Lazarus ascends to the bosom of Abraham.

The rich man descends into what can only be described as 'hell'.

Isn't it funny that now, the rich man can see Lazarus and Lazarus doesn't seem to pay any attention to the rich man at all? Isn't it interesting that fortunes have

been reversed? Isn't it interesting that, even this reversal has not brought the rich man any closer to understanding that he can no longer order people around?

All anyone takes with them in death is their name. In this scenario, only Lazarus has that.

Jesus, what are you trying to tell us?

I don't believe that Jesus is telling anyone that being wealthy is inherently evil. If he hadn't had wealthy people supporting him and his disciples, he would have died of starvation long before the Romans crucified him.

I believe that Jesus is warning those of us who have enough, those of us who have more than enough, not to forget those who do not have even the basics. I also believe that Jesus is reminding us that even within the communities of plenty, there are people hiding the fact that the dogs lapping at their sore places. Don't believe me? Listen to this story from a colleague in another state.

I recently served in the most dangerous city in Southern California. At the heart of the city, we served over 20,000 meals, prayed with people who were dying after drive-by shootings, tried to help heroin addicts who needed just one more week until they were ready to enter a program. Today, I serve a rural population of 1,400 farming community in Texas.

Last night my wife and I stayed with a wealthy family member. They wanted to take us out to dinner and so we thought we were headed to a steak house. When we arrived, we discovered it was a wine tasting dinner party. Neither my spouse or I drink.

The owner of the restaurant invited the owner of French winery in Bordeaux to be the guest and we were supposed to taste his \$500-600 dollar a bottle wines. Each person had 8 glasses of wine to taste between the multi-course, exclusive French chef's cooking.

I was sitting next to two extremely drunk, very pretentious people. I played along as I drank my ice tea. I got to hear all the latest gossip about all the wineries around France and about the difference in wines. At one point, the woman next to me said "I wonder how many 10's of thousands of dollars of wine we've spit out." and she laughed through her stupor in a way that was supposed to impress me.

This evening I was back in Texas attending my first High School football home game with a woman who is raising her adoptive niece and 3 nephews. The woman works full time as a teacher and her biggest desire was simply a few moments to herself. I've been having one-on one conversations with the young adults in town and they all have told me it's the loneliest place for a young adult as there is no place for them to gather and nothing for them to do. Several of them are single mothers and would like just 4-5 hours outside of work or raising children to go see a movie once a month.

As I was reflecting on these three vastly different cultural settings. I was saddened by each and found hope in two, and despair in one. The people in the most dangerous city seemed to genuinely care for one another, the ones in the small town, while struggling, cared deeply for one another and the richest cared more about getting drunk on \$500 bottles of wine and gossiping about those who were not there. Who needed Christ more?

There are huge chasms between the those who have and those who have not.

Sometimes, they look like urban development.

Sometimes, they look like addiction.

Sometimes, they look like mental illness.

Sometimes they look like domestic violence.

Sometimes they look like a French dinner party.

People on both sides of these chasms are captive to their fate. The poor are captive, waiting for someone to notice they are there.

The rich are captive. Captive to the god of success as the world defines it. Captive to holding on to things that they can't take with them.

But, Jesus came to set the captives free.

Our salvation is not anchored in money. It is a gift from God: the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus the Christ. Yes, we need money and we need to be good stewards of what we have, but we can't make it our god. We can't bet our lives on it.

We can bet our lives on God's grace. Lazarus had nothing and then, he had everything.

We don't have to wait until we die to receive this blessing!

What we must do is look around and try to see new worlds and new perspectives.

What does the farmer see? What does the middle-schooler see? What does the

single parent see? What does the grieving widow see? What does the HIV-positive person see? What does the under- or unemployed person see?

How is their perspective different from your own?

Remember, what the rich man lacked was not money, but the willingness to see the world from another point of view. The rich man lacked compassion – the willingness to suffer with another. Not everyone will be remembered like the story of the rich man and Lazarus.

That's something we need to acknowledge. It is only the stories people tell about us that keep our memories alive. Our choice is what sorts of stories will be told about us and whether those stories really need to have our names attached. For every Dorothy Day or St. Francis, there have been thousands of women and men who have lived faithfully and done good works but whose names are lost to history.

We are not immortal. We will all die.

Everything we've put our names on will fade away.

The story we each leave behind to shape the world around us and respond to the needs at our gates – that, my friends, will last forever.