

I'm going to start off my first sermon here at Christ Church doing something I probably shouldn't do... I'm going to share a little self revelation... so here it goes: I... don't like... the heat. I can't stand it. When the dog days of summer arrive, and it's so hot you can fry an egg on the sidewalk, I am miserable. Growing up in St. Louis, Missouri, this presented quite the challenge. Back home, ninety degree temperatures creep into the calendar around May, and it regularly tops 100 degrees throughout June, July and August. It's half the reason I moved out here! I just can't stand the heat.

Perhaps this is a reason why I felt an odd and unsettling connection to the rich man from Christ's parable today. In the parable, a rich man, finely dressed, enjoys his life of wealth and comfort. He feasts sumptuously every day, enjoying his life from the security of his gated home. Yet outside his gate sits Lazarus. Poor, marginalized, forgotten Lazarus. Dying Lazarus. As the parable progresses, both men pass away... notably, poor Lazarus first, and then the rich man. In the afterlife, the rich man finds himself being tormented in Hades. From far away, he sees Lazarus who in the afterlife was not taken to Hades, but instead carried away by angels to be with Abraham. The rich man, seeking consolation from the hot fires of Hades, asks if Lazarus could only dip the tip of his finger in water and cool his tongue... such a small, simple act. Abraham responds with judgment, condemning the rich man to his agony. Recognizing his fate, the rich man hopes Lazarus can be sent to warn his brothers, that they may be spared from this torture. "No", replies Abraham. His brothers have the prophets, those who bring the good news and call the people to repent... if the brothers will not listen to the prophets, then they will certainly not listen to one risen from the dead.

This is a crucial parable. In the scope of Luke's narrative, this text comes after the parables of the prodigal son and the dishonest manager. At this point in Luke's gospel, Jesus is teaching his disciples about the dangers of wealth. The underlying point is simple: do not make wealth accumulation a single focus while on your earthly pilgrimage; our focus instead must be on God who has given us all good things.

When looked at from a larger context, fitting the parable of the rich man and Lazarus within the grand themes of Luke's gospel, more connections can be made to one of Luke's most central themes: that the lowly and poor shall be exalted, and the rich and mighty brought down. Luke overtly states this teaching in Mary's magnificat, her song of praise to the Lord, when she proclaims "He has brought down the powerful from their thrones and lifted up the lowly. Jesus' humble birth in a manger continues this theme, as do the beatitudes of his great sermon. This theme is integral to Luke. So much so, that this specific story of the rich man and Lazarus is not found in the other gospels.

However, this theme is not just native to Luke. Our lectionary today illustrates this resoundingly. Did you hear the resonances throughout? From Amos to Psalm 146 to Timothy, our lectionary texts urges us to look past the riches here on earth, and instead seek a God who gives food to the hungry, and justice to the oppressed.

Returning to the gospel story, I can't help but shake my initial identification and attachment to the rich man in this story. Beyond the rich man and my shared disdain for hot destinations, I wonder: what do I have in common with this parable's protagonist? I'm not particularly rich – after all, being **broke** and **hungry** is the most common denominator among seminarians. But, I most certainly live a stable, secure, privileged life. Could that be our commonality? Diving deeper into the text, the puzzle pieces begin to connect. At this rich man's gate lays poor, lowly, sick Lazarus. Lazarus, who must beg every day for money, or for food or drink. Does the rich man know about Lazarus and his stricken condition? Or does he conveniently pass Lazarus by, on the way to work and daily life?

The key to knowing this might be found when the rich man is in Hades. He sees poor Lazarus now **sitting** with Abraham, enjoying a peace that the world could not give him. And the rich man cries out, "Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in the water and cool my tongue." ... Send Lazarus. He knew his name. He knew Lazarus. He knew the poor man who begged outside his gate. He knew the man whose abhorrent sores were licked by dogs. He knew that there was a hungry man feet away, and yet he still feasted sumptuously every day. He knew him, and did nothing.

This lowest of lows, is why I connect with the rich man. I too see the hungry every day. I see the hurt, and I see the marginalized. And while we surely can't help everyone, I can't help but ask myself: who am I choosing not to see? What does my privilege and security allow me to look past? Who, for my own convenience, am I not paying attention to?

Earlier this week, a friend of mine from school shared a video on Facebook. Maybe you have seen it, or at least seen it shared: it is the video of the final moments of Terrence Crutcher's life. Terrence, a 40-year-old black man, a father, a church going man, was coming home from night school when trouble caused him to pull his vehicle off to the side of the road. Law enforcement arrived on the scene, and after a short episode of undeterminable compliance, Terrence was shot dead by police.

It is a truly graphic video. At first, I chose not to watch it. It was too much. So I sat there, and safely stared at my computer screen.

More distressing news broke later in the week. Another black man killed at the hands of law enforcement, this time in Charlotte, North Carolina. By now, perhaps you've heard about the Charlotte protests; they are akin to the unrest seen in my hometown of St. Louis in 2014, and in Baltimore, and our own New York City.

As the protests swelled this week, I thought back to the video of Terrence Crutcher's death that I conveniently looked away from earlier in the week. This time I watched. Now I know Terrence Crutcher's name. I know the name of the man whose last moments in life I conveniently looked away from. Like the rich man, I now know Lazarus' name.

We see the marginalized. We see the broken and battered. As Christians, what do we do? How do we act? One answer to this question can be found right in front of us. In a few minutes, we will partake in the baptismal service of Grace _____. Part of this service is the reaffirmation of the Baptismal Covenant we made, or made on our behalf, at our very own baptism, years ago. The Baptismal Covenant is perhaps the most important part of our lives as Christians. The directives ground our whole life in the ways of Jesus Christ and the love of God.

Throughout the covenant we make promises, to affirm apostolic teaching and proclaim through word and example the Good News of Christ. Challenging, lifelong commands. The final promise of the Baptismal Covenant may just be the hardest of all. This final question asks us directly: “Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?” ... “Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being??” As a church, we respond affirmatively: I will, with God’s help....

[I] Read this statement. [And I] think about Lazarus. [I] think about the man begging for food outside my old subway station on 86th street. And I think about Terrence Crutcher. We cannot pass them by. We cannot look in the other direction when it is convenient for us. We cannot simply know their name, their face, and do nothing. We made a promise to God – to strive for justice and peace among all people, and to respect the dignity of every human being. And we do this, with God’s help.

Amen.