

How Shall We Know September 25

Luke 16:19-31

¹⁹“There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. ²⁰And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, ²¹who longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man’s table; even the dogs would come and lick his sores. ²²The poor man died and was carried away by the angels to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried. ²³In Hades, where he was being tormented, he looked up and saw Abraham far away with Lazarus by his side. ²⁴He called out, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am in agony in these flames.’ ²⁵But Abraham said, ‘Child, remember that during your lifetime you received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in agony. ²⁶Besides all this, between you and us a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who might want to pass from here to you cannot do so, and no one can cross from there to us.’ ²⁷He said, ‘Then, father, I beg you to send him to my father’s house— ²⁸for I have five brothers—that he may warn them, so that they will not also come into this place of torment.’ ²⁹Abraham replied, ‘They have Moses and the prophets; they should listen to them.’ ³⁰He said, ‘No, father Abraham; but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will change.’ ³¹He said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.’”

According to Luke, Jesus sees that some in the temple
care more about their wealth
than their neighbors
and after a few one liners,
he tells them a story

*Once there was a rich man, dressed in purple of royalty,
who ate sumptuous meals
while Lazarus, poor man, is starving at his gate
with only the dogs come to lick his sores.*

*for when they both die and Lazarus is in the bosom of Abraham
and the rich man is in agony
he asks Abraham to send Lazarus,
to bring him water,
to serve him even in death.*

*It cannot be, says Abraham,
for there is a chasm that has opened up
between you.*

*Then will you send him to warn his brothers
begs Abraham to send Lazarus to warn them
them that the same might happen to them
Abraham says no again
for they will listened to no prophet
neither will they when someone comes to them
from the dead
Then how shall they know, pleads the man..*

*it's a disturbing story – I get confused
when I hear of torment:
it doesn't fit with God as Love,
yet the story's truths seem borne out from
persons who have shared their near-death experiences.
Persons who, in the time between their heart stopping
and starting again,
had a startling shift in awareness.
They perceived not a great light,
But the pain they'd caused others.*

*One man recounts that he became acutely aware that he had
Of the harmful abuse he'd inflicted on his wife.
and now, in death, he was tormented by realizing
that there was now a chasm between him and her,
and he couldn't cross it,
and repair the damage done.*

A young woman who experienced a sudden death,
tells of own metanoia (change of thinking or consciousness)
for in that moment,
she realized she'd lived a self-centered life.
indifferent to other's suffering
The realization that
she no longer had the opportunity
to change her life
were the flames of hell for her.

Both of these persons seemed anxious that we understand
the agony of regret. Just as Lazarus wants to warn his brothers
that a change is required in them, too.

Jesus, invites us to introspection,
How might we be like the rich man,
Inattentive to the Lazarus at our gate?

Of course, we can get overwhelmed with all that need our attention
And all that needs to be righted.

I will confess that poor at our intersections are now so ubiquitous
that I am mostly irritated
and try not to see them.

But my daughter sees them.
We will drive past an intersection, and she will remark
about what is on their sign
or how ill they looked and express her concern.

She always sees them
She always did,
like most children, she was never afraid of the poor
I remember the mangiest man walking toward us one day
his face scouring, his hair wild, his clothes mangled.
and she lit up and said "Hi!"

There was no gate,
no sense of distance or difference
She senses a kinship that, often, I cannot or do not.

You know people like this.

Can we, a time of such division, between parties and nations,
experience such a metanoia
that we might also comprehend one another
across all the chasms of our own creation
all the categories that we've formed
all the distinctions we have made?

May we see our essential kinship and live it
before **our** hearts stop and we feel the agony of regret?

Jesus in his story is inviting us to do so.

I was in a workshop last week with a wonderful man
named Ron Heifetz,
a Jew, who with all other Jews is today celebrating
Rosh Hashana, the New Year, three days
when creation is made new again
and there is opportunity to reflect
restore relationships with God and others,
to change.

Ron spoke of learning to see everyone,
strangers, or particularly those whom we see as
unworthy, unlike us,
as a whole world
one of great love and great suffering
of good actions and bad ones
just like us.

What if we can hold the complexity of that
in our hearts?

If we accept others as “whole worlds”
What change might that bring in us?

Bishop Frank Griswold of the Episcopal church
Tells of going into the zone near the World Trade Center
Just after the terrorist attack.
Still standing was the old Trinity Episcopal Church
2 to 3 feet of ash covering the pews
but the church was intact
and there was Jesus, crucified,
with his arms outstretched

Jesus, who, Bishop Griswold realized,
could hold this all together,
all the stories, all the lives, all the worlds
of perpetrators and victims
into one great whole
to be offered to God.

Jesus wanted his follower to hold as much as they can in their hearts
In this life and to allow that to change us.

So, perhaps, we can practice;
practice loving across chasms,
practice ignoring the boundaries we've made,
practice introspection of Rosh Hashana:
practice beginning again.

On Tuesday of this week,
I met a man at our blessing box.
His name was Charles, he said,
and it was his 46th birthday.
Is there anything I can get you,
no, thank you for this, as he put some granola bars
in his backpack.
He shared that his mother had died recently
from Alzheimers

he'd lost his father to violence when he was young
and his brother from an overdose
and now his mum.

So its just you,

*Yes, but I have Spencer and Stewart
do you know them?*

we have a place we stay,

a small encampment, it seemed

so I'm good.

Someone stole my tent, but it will be okay.

He was trying to write something on a piece of paper

I could see his implement wasn't working.

I'll get one, I found a marker
and handed it to him

Then realize he was making a sign to hold
by the side of the road.

I'm Charles. Today is my 46th birthday.

I found myself hoping people would see him,
would read it

would acknowledge, in some small way
the humanity before them.

Cross the chasms between

you while you can, says Jesus in this story,

May we do so. Amen.

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