

REFLECTION OF GRACE

A Weekly Reflection on Stewardship from our Members



Sunday, September 25 | Gospel
Luke 16: 19-31



Jesus said, "There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man's table; even the dogs would come and lick his sores. The poor man died and was carried away by the angels to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried. In Hades, where he was being tormented, he looked up and saw Abraham far away with Lazarus by his side. He 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.' But 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. Besides 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.' He said, 'Then, father, I beg you to send him to my father's house-- for I have five brothers-- that he may warn them, so that they will not also come into this place of torment.' Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the prophets; they should listen to them.' He said, 'No, father Abraham; but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' He 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.'"

A TALE OF TWO NEIGHBORS

By Allyn Jaqua Lowell

I recently began dabbling in constitutional law, which has been enthralling and terrifying. But then I was asked to write on a parable involving a guy in Hades, and constitutional law suddenly seems easy. "Hades" makes me exceedingly uncomfortable – surely I'm not alone? I like Jesus gentle, comfortable, maybe even agreeing (with me) that my true spirit is generous and kind. But, I know He is unlikely as easily placated by some good deeds as I. And so, I delved into this parable, not to discern my best argument of how I pass Jesus' "test," but to determine how I don't and how (and more importantly, why) I should do more. Quite the can of worms.

The dichotomy between a rich man who ends up in Hades and a poor man who ends up in heaven is apparent. But is it their economic trappings that make one "bad" and the other "good"? Not so simple. A look at the Greek translation is illustrative: the purple cloth the rich man wears ("porphyra" in Greek) was among the most expensive of textiles, while the "fine linen," in Greek "bussot," was used by high priests. Best case, the rich man was preparing to celebrate God. Alas, the parable says that he was, in fact, celebrating his own life – not a special occasion, just all the time. All while a poor man named Lazarus lay at his gate.

continued on back

We know little of Lazarus or why he lay there. Perhaps he had been placed there by family, knowing that in Jewish tradition/expectation, the rich man would fulfill his duty to care for him, even if only to give him leftovers. Regardless, Lazarus' destitution is not as significant; instead, what the rich man has overlooked in his excess, is key.

Even when the rich man asks Abraham to tell his brothers how to avoid his own sentence, he shows he does not even know what landed him there. Perhaps he wants to know – in seeing the warning to his brothers – how he could have avoided his fate. To me, it seems that the rich man has never considered that he failed the poor man and, even more importantly, that he could have gained much in helping him. What joy, what brotherhood, what unity with God, would that kindness have yielded back to him?

I see the obtuseness of the rich man (who cares for his brothers while never acknowledging Lazarus' existence) in myself. One need not be the most selfish person to be the rich man of this parable – any of us can unwittingly be him. I know I can. And yet, I know that I've derived more joy and more affinity with Christ when I've put others before myself. Not just my own family, my friends, but people unknown to me but known and loved by our Father. God's kingdom is right in front of us now; if only we could see it and act accordingly.

Allyn has been attending Ascension since 2009, and her twins, Hunter and Greer, are lifetime attendees (since their birth in 2012). Allyn is an attorney at Thompson Coburn, where she works on social justice issues and labor and employment. She and her husband Zach enjoy spending time with family and friends when they're not at one of their kids' many, many sporting events. Allyn has great affection and gratitude for Ascension as it was the first place she put down roots after moving to Texas, and because of its diverse and wonderful community.

