
22nd Sunday after Pentecost 2020
Galatians 6:11-18 & Luke 16:19-31

When waterbeds were still the rage a few years ago, an article was submitted to the Reader's Digest by a subscriber saying, "A friend of mine awoke one morning to find a puddle of water in the middle of his king-size waterbed. To fix the puncture, he rolled the heavy mattress outdoors and filled it with more water so he could locate the leak more easily. The enormous bag of water was impossible to control and began rolling on the hilly terrain. He tried to hold it back, but it headed downhill and landed in a clump of bushes that poked it full of holes.

Disgusted, my friend threw out the waterbed frame and moved a standard bed into his room. The next morning, he awoke to find a puddle of water in the new bed. The upstairs bathroom had a leaky drain. (Reader's Digest, March 1993, p. 12) There is no simple answer as to why misfortunes happen in life.

But we know it doesn't take long for us to realize trials, setbacks, and disappointments are a part of everyday life. Even those who appear to be problem-free do run into disappointment when the natural flow of life suddenly takes a detour – a child takes to drugs, a business goes bankrupt, or a family member dies. The reversals may be something we bring on ourselves by making wrong choices, others may have a hand in it, or they may be the work of God.

Among the many lessons the parable in our Gospel teaches us, nothing is more important than realizing money may prevent us from achieving a spiritual life. The rich man in the Gospel never learned that giving is as essential as having, and money cannot guarantee their security nor produce happiness. (Luke 16:19-31)

In our Gospel reading this morning, we are presented with two types of men with two destinies. Each represents the extremes of our society. One was wealthy, the other poor. The rich man dressed exceptionally well and always ate his fill. He was most likely a prominent citizen, even though there was no mention of his name. The poor man, Lazarus, was destitute and "full of sores," He lay by the gate waiting for the food that fell from the rich man's table. And the dogs came and licked his sores. Lazarus is on the outside looking in.

Eventually, Lazarus died. The poor man went to the heavenly banquet feast and given the place of honour right next to Abraham. The rich man also died but went to Hades. Now the rich man is on the outside looking in. The two men's earthly roles became reversed in eternity.

In trying to find the meaning of this parable, we must not look at it as a literal interpretation of heaven and hell because that is not Jesus' point. The point is that God is concerned with reversing human injustices. Often in Luke's Gospel, we find Jesus challenging the rich and blessing the poor. From Hades, the rich man sees Abraham far off with Lazarus "in his bosom." He calls out, "Father Abraham, have mercy upon me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am in

anguish in this flame." Abraham points out that the two men's roles became reversed permanently. The chasm between the two remains distant. Even if some deceased person went to Hades and returned, no one there would repent. Abraham says, "If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead."

Here Jesus focuses on the unacceptable inequalities of life. One man has a daily feast while another starves a few feet away. Jesus says that God will not tolerate such inequities forever.

The situation is not any different now. Just look at the world today. Do you see a new day coming when justice shall prevail, all inequities transformed, and all suffering healed? Hardly. The world doesn't distribute wealth equally to everyone. The gap between the rich only grows more expansive each year. John D. Rockefeller has three simple rules for anyone who wants to become rich: 1. Go to work early. 2. Stay at work late. 3. Find oil. (Source Unknown.)

The Old Testament shows us a God who works within time and history, a God whose prophets denounce the injustices of their people, and a God who does not spare even the Holy City when it turns away from justice and mercy. The New Testament speaks of the coming of God's kingdom. Jesus came preaching and teaching, "Behold, the kingdom of heaven is at hand." And this isn't restricted to the heavenly kingdom but is breaking into our world all the time. It was revealed by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. God is at work in the world to establish the eternal kingdom.

So, if this is true, why is there so much injustice in the world today? Why is there so much suffering? Why are newscasts filled with stories of systemic racism? If God wants to establish a kingdom in this world, why doesn't it happen? It's because God respects our human freedom and will continue to honour it. Our ability to choose is a part of what being created in God's image really means. God will not transform us by force or coercion but only through the persuasion of suffering love. God's kingdom is primarily the kingdom of love. Our invitation is to tell the world about His love and work to expand His kingdom. The invitation means our primary calling is to increase Christ-like love, both within the church and throughout the world.

Ultimately, the kingdom of God will triumph over all earthly kingdoms. Yes, injustices persist, but not forever. Their defeat is imminent. "There is a tide," Shakespeare wrote, "that runs through human affairs. There are persuasive powers of right, goodness, and truth moving like currents through human history. Some can oppose them but cannot destroy them."

"Conversion" is a simple word that means "turning around." It is a turning from going in one direction and going in another. Jesus Christ is with us as God's empowering Spirit. He is the source of our strength for fulfilling our holy and redemptive work in the world.

Amen!