

Scripture Reading:
Luke 16:19-31

Offering the Kingdom

Now I'm going to talk about this parable in Luke but I want to start with a few disclaimers.

1. There are a lot of things about this parable I do not like.
2. I don't believe in that kind of heaven and hell and I don't believe that God judges us with a simple in or out and then we from heaven will watch those suffering in hell with a kind of "you got what's coming to you attitude"
3. That being said I think this parable has very little to do with the afterlife and a whole lot more to do with how we live here and now.

The question that arises for me in this parable is Who do we see? and Who do we not see? Although it is not explicitly stated it seems fairly obvious that Rich man (whose name we don't know) knew and walked by the poor beggar Lazarus daily and didn't even see him. After all Lazarus sat at the rich man's gate everyday hoping to eat some of the crumbs that fell from his table. It seems the rich man is being punished for not acknowledging, seeing, or helping Lazarus.

How often do we see but not act? How often do we turn a blind eye? How often do we walk by on the other side? How often are we given an opportunity to offer the kingdom of God and we ignore to satisfy our own selfish needs or desires? The Rich man in this story has not been sent to hades because he is rich, he is being punished because he chose not to care for Lazarus. God does not punish us for privilege, but when our privilege leads us to arrogant, hardened hearts we create hell for ourselves and more so for others. See that is what I believe hell is - it is what we in our greed, selfishness, and arrogance create in our world. The injustices we allow create hell on earth.

Jesus in these chapters in Luke is speaking to his disciples along with a crowd of tax collectors, and pharisees who have begun to follow him. He is addressing their status, authority and wealth, calling them to account. See the difference between Jesus and his listeners is when Jesus sees an issue or a problem or an injustice he acts on it. As followers of Jesus we are invited to do the same.

The problem is living as Jesus does takes time and energy and it will likely cost us and so it is a whole lot easier to walk on by. If we don't really open our eyes or ears or hearts we can easily ignore. Most of us do it every day. I'm guilty of it all the time. I walk right by the person at the door begging for a little more at the grocery store because I'm in a rush, and I don't have anything on me. But you know at times I feel the hurt of that. At times I can actually physically feel a hardening when I get in a rush, when I see an injustice and I don't respond. Am I creating

my own hell when I do not do that which I know I should? Am I creating hell for that person who sees me walk on by?

One of the most common hardening of the hearts I watch in the church is how we speak to and about one another. I see it in national church meetings, in conference meetings, in presbytery meetings and in our own congregational meetings. My heart regularly breaks in church meetings - why is that? Why do we speak with such disrespect? Why do we not recognize the need for love, grace and equality for all, even those in the church? I dare say until we do we will continue to decline because people can see right through us.

How will our hardened hearts be broken? The Rich man begs for Lazarus to go and tell his brothers that there is a better way to live but Abraham responds “They have Moses and the prophets, they should listen to them” Well then I ask what’s our excuse? We have Moses and the prophets and Jesus and Paul and James and Mother Theresa, and Desmond Tutu and Martin Luther King Jr. and you get it right? What will break our hardened hearts?

See Jesus says ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.’” Opps. He was right. Not long after this conversation the disciples don’t believe the women who tell them they have seen the messiah alive. Jesus walks with them on the road to Emmaus and they fail to recognize him.

Resurrection requires a whole new way of seeing. Salvation requires recognition and action against the injustices we witness in our everyday lives.

What are the things that you see? What opens your eyes?

- I now have a practice of saying hello to the person asking for money. I look them directly in the eye and force myself not to look away. I don’t always give, I can’t always give but I can always treat others as human beings. My daughter now sometimes asks if she can give and I always figure out a way to make that happen because we are daily given the opportunity to offer a glimpse of the kingdom of God and I believe that is what we do when we face the needs of others head on rather than turning away.

What are the things that you see? What opens your eyes? What breaks your hardened hearts? I invite you to consider this week what injustice you have turned a blind eye to and then ponder what will break your hardened heart so that you might offer God’s kingdom here on earth.