

Squamish United Church
Rev. Karen Millard

September 29, 2019

Scriptures:

1 Timothy 6:6-19

Amos 6:1a, 4-7

Luke 16:19-31

Learn Your Lessons Well

[SOCRATES]

I can see a swath of sinners sittin' yonder
And they're actin' like a pack of fools
Gazin' into space they let their minds wander
'Stead of studyin' the good Lord's rules
You better pay attention
Build your comprehension
There's gonna be a quiz at your ascension
Not to mention any threat of hell
But if you're smart you'll learn your lessons well!

Every bright description of the promised land meant
You can reach it if you keep alert
Learnin' every line and every last commandment
May not help you but it couldn't hurt
First ya gotta read 'em then ya gotta heed 'em
You never know when you're gonna need 'em
Just as old Elijah said to Jezebel
You better start to learn your lessons well!

I can't read today's scriptures without hearing that song. It happened to be one of my solo's when I did Godspell so that is I am sure why it gets stuck in my head but it is a summation of what today's message is. See we can know the rules and all of the scriptures but if we don't live them out then we really are like a pack of fools. (Now don't get too deep into the theology of the words around quizzes at your ascension etc. just listen to the suggestion. Learn your lessons well).

The Rev. Dr. Chris Tuttle wrote "Somehow, interestingly, this parable often shows up here in the fall, when many of us preachers are navigating our way through stewardship season. We want to speak of the joy of seeing your gifts shared with others in a way that changes things. But we're also stuck. We preachers have a budget to raise, our own salary included. Some of this money goes out to organizations that feed and clothe and house, that are on the ground with

hurting people in ways our churches hope to be ... But these are anxious times. Regardless of glimmers of hope amongst economic indicators, we don't feel free. Folks in our pews are still worried about their jobs. Too many churches, even good, strong churches, are hedging bets as they build the budget, asking those who run programs to run them on less, neglecting raises for staff, *or considering cutting* again, letting the budget anxiety nudge them into making decisions that lead to more keeping, more hoarding, less giving so we don't feel free. Dr. Tuttle is 100% correct. This passage hit me this week on the same day I received an email from the treasurer to our board with a call to action and a call to open our eyes to our budget constraints. Times are hard for us as a church and we will definitely need to address this. If you are interested in figuring out how to give so that we can continue our work and continue to care for our community please see some options in the bulletin. Still when we give we want to give out of gratitude and out of care for community and others and this is exactly what Jesus calls us each to do.

Jesus hits us on the head with this parable. As best I can tell, the immediate context begins on the way to dinner at "the house of a leader of the Pharisees" in chapter 14. The conversation continues, the crowds gather, and by 15:1, "all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him." Chapter 15 holds the parables that build upon each other--lost sheep, lost coin, lost brother. Luke 16 ...begins and ends with a parables that start with, "There was a rich man...."

This theme doesn't appear out of the blue. The warning that one's wealth must be handled wisely has been a recurring theme in the travel narrative. At dinner Jesus denounced the greed of the Pharisees (11:39-41), the rich fool forfeited his soul (12:13-21). The prudent steward was praised (12:42-48), and warnings are given throughout chapter 12 regarding how to prepare for the final accounting. No one can be Jesus' disciple who will not give up all his possessions (14:33).^[1] And, despite the insertion of sayings about the law, kingdom, and divorce in between 16:1-13 and 16:19-31, it is likely that they will still hear the preceding parables' final words, "You cannot serve God and wealth," ringing in their ears."¹

You may or may not have figured out by now that in this parable most of us are the rich man. Although we don't feel it in this economy many folks who attend mainline churches are among the wealthiest in the world. In mainline churches the number of folks with graduate-level education in our congregations is really high. We--you and I are among the richest and most-well educated religious people around.

Still we are apt to forget that nearly 1/2 of the world's population — more than 3 billion people — live on less than \$2.50 a day. More than 1.3 billion live in extreme poverty — less than \$1.25 a day. 1 billion children worldwide are living in poverty and according to UNICEF, 22,000 children die each day due to poverty.

A total of 3.4 million Canadians, representing 9.5 percent of the population, lived in poverty in 2017, 622,000 children under 18 years of age, or 9.0%, lived below the **poverty line**, there **are** approximately 557,000 **people** in **BC** living below the **poverty line** – 99,000 **are** children. In 2016, the child poverty rate in British Columbia was 20.3%, This represents 172,550, or one in

¹ http://day1.org/5224-blindness_and_a_vision_of_community

five, BC children 0-17 years old living in poverty. BC's child poverty rate was higher than Canada's child poverty rate of 19.6%.

Tuttle writes "We sit in our homes and churches and feast, sumptuously, Luke says, while folks sit at the gates picking their sores. Many of us get it. It is hard to make ends meet but these scriptures remind us of our tasks at hand.

Martin Luther King Jr. preached on this parable saying:

"There is nothing in that parable," "that says Dives [the Latin name for the rich man] went to hell because he was rich. Jesus never made a universal indictment against all wealth."...King claims that, "Dives went to hell not because he was rich, but because he passed by Lazarus every day and never really saw him." He moves on to say that, "Dives went to hell because he allowed Lazarus to become invisible...because he failed to use his wealth to bridge the gulf that separated him from his brother Lazarus. In fact, he didn't even realize that Lazarus was his brother.

If King is right, this may not be, ultimately, a text about poverty, about our wealth, or about the proper allocation of resources. This is a text about vision. This is a text in which Jesus calls us to confront the reality that every day we pass by people who are in desperate need--in obvious ways, and in far deeper less obvious ones--and we walk right by. Most of the time I genuinely don't think we do this on purpose. But the results are the same. Needs are not met. Children remain homeless. Adults, people you know, even, remain trapped in desperate fear and loneliness. It seems to me that one of the reasons that poverty is so difficult to confront is because it forces us to look into the eyes of people who are not as different from us as we would like to believe, and hear their stories, and walk with them in their struggles, and see, really see, the pain living in their eyes.² It is my hope that we as a church are doing our best to keep our eyes open. If our purpose is not about caring for those in our community, if our purpose is not about addressing the needs of others and making our world and community more alive and more abundant we have lost our way.

So I wonder to what are we blind? This week most of us were faced with an opportunity to open our eyes to the global climate crisis. We were given many opportunities to see and recognize that our world is 'on fire.' Admittedly I felt a little guilt about not feeling I had the time to go protest and for many they will feel that was a wrong move on my part (maybe it was). At the same time I will say that my eyes are more open and I see the damage we do when we don't bother to make life changes. Poverty for others and our world is a part of what we all create. You (we) all have your own contextual distractions, and we are all busy dealing with our lives and our work and our families. So many people heading in so many different directions and everyone is tired all the time. And a man asks us for change on the street and we put our blinders on as we head into Save-on. We are in a hurry and need to get groceries after all.

"In that same speech in Montreat, King continues: "I submit this is the challenge facing the church, to be as concerned as our Christ about the least of these, our brothers and sisters. And we must do it because in the final analysis we are all to live together, rich and poor, lettered and unlettered, tutored and untutored. Somehow we are tied in a single garment of destiny, caught in an inescapable network of mutuality." "And for some reason," King says to us, "I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be, and you can never be what you ought to be

² IBID

until I am what I ought to be. This is the way God made the world...we must all learn to live together as brothers [and sisters] or we will all perish as fools."

It's all about community. Culpepper writes: "The parable is addressed to 'lovers of money.' At the beginning, hearers or readers may assume that they are expected to identify with the rich man or with Lazarus, but the parable is far more subtle than that. By the end of the parable we realize that we stand in the place of the brothers, and the question is whether we will hear the Scriptures and repent."

These are hard days, to be sure. But Lazarus is in front of us, at the gates, every day. And we still have the chance to change things, if only we are willing to see.

"Somewhere along the way, we as a people forgot that we belong to our community, and our community belongs to us. Something powerful happens when we remember." We begin to see the world in a different way. We begin to find our voice. We begin to know our neighbors. We begin to feel like we are part of our village."³ That my friends is what we are about. What we are called to be.

Some of this we are doing very well and some of this we as a church need to continue to grow and work on. As we think about who we are to be as a community and as we celebrate our 2nd anniversary in this new facility I thought we could take a moment and hear what we drew out of who we are from the Welcome Back (Pancake Breakfast) Sunday.

Here are some results (I won't have everything but some highlights and we will continue to work on putting the information out there and developing out of it). As you listen I want to encourage you to figure out where and how you too might like to participate and please let me know.

What are the joys and strengths you see and experience at Squamish United Church?

- **Inclusive**
- So much energy
- Small kids
- Fun
- Numbers
- Caring ministries
- Love
- Home
- **Family**
- Welcoming space
- Breakfast
- Joyous
- Fellowship
- Creative services
- **Welcoming**

³ https://pamplinmedia.com/cr/26-features/439156-350925-think-big-start-local-at-oak-grove-united-methodist-church?fbclid=IwAR1ZHCYrGfX7zevmebdrMGNple43dnQE2sDuw7SUjaYyF5KXoC-1hMNfBkl&wallit_nosession=1

- Happy to see friends
- Relaxed
- Variety in worship services
- Great start up
- Children's church
- Bright open space
- Kids friendly
- Opportunity through spirit kids
- Church is a church everyday
- Comfortable to attend
- Joys and smiles, welcome from all the people
- **Children**
- Main message is Love "God is Love"
- Food
- Consistency
- New beginnings
- Community
- Friendship
- Laughter

What area need some attention here at Squamish United Church?

- Modern music
- Opportunities for discussion on values
- Bible studies on broader issues
- **Bible studies**
- Wheelchair ramp to the pulpit
- Youth outreach
- **Outreach**
- Telephone follow up
- **Volunteers**
- Congregational events
- An opportunity for kids to serve
- Coffee location (move it to the sanctuary)
- Continue to encourage and welcome people of diverse backgrounds
- Name tags
- **Financial support**
- **Choir Adult and children**
- Inter faith support
- Fellowship opportunities for people to get to know one another
- **Seniors programs**
- Proactive in taking care of the facility
- Sanctuary to nurture the soul
- Church family continues
- Band
- New leadership

- New curtain rail
- Hymn books
- Got the word out in the community about how inclusive this church is

What might we do as a congregation to move forward in a positive way?

- Participating and volunteering in community events
- Hope and trust in God's direction to evolve into a more complex community and congregation.
- Catch up to our present story (looking forward, not reminiscing)
- Gather in social settings rather than meetings
- Gather wisdom from the congregation
- Encouraging involvement from all church family members
- Focus on what's working and stay the course
- Find meaningful work and jobs to do
- Hold more cultural events
- Share in art and music
- Have outings
- Engage more new people in good works
- Connect more with helping hands

Let us pray. Christ of vision, clear our eyes. Challenge us, we who love what we have--our money, our things, our identities--with a vision of Your beloved community, a community that includes all. Amen.