

Luke 16:19-31

Jesus tells a parable about a wealthy man who failed to share with the poor beggar outside of his gates, and who finds himself in torment after death, while Lazarus, the beggar, finds himself in comfort.

"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.'"

Systems of inequity and injustice are sustained because individuals don't know how to contribute to change. When it comes to addressing poverty, the quest is to offer those who suffer dignity, hope and networks that can enable them to move out of their poverty and into sustainable livelihoods. For followers of Christ that may mean befriending someone who is poor, or partnering as a community with a less advantaged community. It may mean offering time and abilities to work in shelters, or projects that make a difference. It may mean being more careful about how we use our money, and investing in projects that uplift and support the poor. It may mean simply learning to resist the urge to buy more than we need, and it may mean working to change any laws or practices that disadvantage the poor, the weak and the marginalised. *(John van de Laar, Sacredise)*

COCU58C Readings

The subject of money is revisited again this week, but this time, it is connected with the ideas of compassion and generosity.

In a generous act of optimism, Jeremiah buys his cousin's land, even though he knows that Judah will be conquered. The Psalm stresses the importance of trusting God rather than people or things, and Timothy warns against seeking to accumulate wealth for its own sake. Finally, in a dramatic parable, Jesus contrasts the consequence of wealth that is not shared with the plight, and salvation of the poor.

There is no question, in the light of this, that God is "on the side" of the poor, that God calls us to put our trust in God, and that wealth is to be shared and distributed equitably. For those of us who are among the wealthy (which pretty much includes anyone who has internet access to read this) God's word is direct and challenging – the poor need our faith, our generosity and our voice which challenges the wealthy to share. But, they also need our optimism, and the prophetic voice that trusts in God's purposes over human wisdom or systems.

The wealth of the world is desperately unevenly distributed and the gap between rich and poor continues to widen. Millions of people live on less than \$2 a day – some on less than \$1 – and struggle just to put food on the table or a roof over their children's heads. And this dire poverty is solveable. All it requires is the will to put pressure on leaders, law-makers, and corporate heads, and the optimism and faith to embrace and live the economics of God's reign.

Our world-economic systems need to change, and this change can be created through pockets of people who live differently and who support those who live differently – programs of social entrepreneurship, micro-lending, bartering and ethical consumerism all make big differences when small contributions are combined.

(John van de Laar, Sacredise)

Psalm 91:1-6, 14-16

God promises refuge, protection and long life to those who trust in God.

You who live in the shelter of the Most High, who abide in the shadow of the Almighty, will say to the LORD:

"My refuge and my fortress; my God, in whom I trust."

For God will deliver you from the snare of the fowler and from the deadly pestilence; God's pinions will cover you, and under God's wings you will find refuge; God's faithfulness is a shield and buckler. You will not fear the terror of the night, or the arrow that flies by day, or the pestilence that stalks in darkness, or the destruction that wastes at noonday.

(Hear the words of assurance of God's protection)

Those who love me, I will deliver;

I will protect those who know my name.

When they call to me, I will answer them;

I will be with them in trouble, I will rescue them and honor them.

With long life I will satisfy them, and show them my salvation.

Jeremiah 32:1-3a, 6-15

In spite of his prophecies of the destruction of Judah, Jeremiah buys his cousin's field and proclaims God's word that people will again buy property in the land of Judah.

The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD in the tenth year of King Zedekiah of Judah, which was the eighteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar. At that time the army of the king of Babylon was besieging Jerusalem, and the prophet Jeremiah was confined in the court of the guard that was in the palace of the king of Judah, where King Zedekiah of Judah had confined him.

Jeremiah said, The word of the LORD came to me: Hanamel son of your uncle Shallum is going to come to you and say, "Buy my field that is at Anathoth, for the right of redemption by purchase is yours." Then my cousin Hanamel came to me in the court of the guard, in accordance with the word of the LORD, and said to me, "Buy my field that is at Anathoth in the land of Benjamin, for the right of possession and redemption is yours; buy it for yourself." Then I knew that this was the word of the LORD. And I bought the field at Anathoth from my cousin Hanamel, and weighed out the money to him, seventeen shekels of silver. I signed the deed, sealed it, got witnesses, and weighed the money on scales. Then I took the sealed deed of purchase, containing the terms and conditions, and the open copy;

and I gave the deed of purchase to Baruch son of Neriah son of Mahseiah, in the presence of my cousin Hanamel, in the presence of the witnesses who signed the deed of purchase, and in the presence of all the Judeans who were sitting in the court of the guard. In their presence I charged Baruch, saying, Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Take these deeds, both this sealed deed of purchase and this open deed, and put them in an earthenware jar, in order that they may last for a long time. For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Houses and fields and vineyards shall again be bought in this land.

1 Timothy 6:6-19

Followers of Christ are encouraged to be content with what they have, not to strive after wealth, and to share generously with others.

Of course, there is great gain in godliness combined with contentment; for we brought nothing into the world, so that we can take nothing out of it; but if we have food and clothing, we will be content with these. But those who want to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains. But as for you, man of God, shun all this; pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith; take hold of the eternal life, to which you were called and for which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. In the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who in his testimony before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, I charge you to keep the commandment without spot or blame until the manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ, which he will bring about at the right time - he who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords. It is he alone who has immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see; to him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen. As for those who in the present age are rich, command them not to be haughty, or to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but rather on God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share, thus storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life that really is life.