

Are You Listening?
September 19, 2010
Luke 16:19 – 31

The Word of God for the People of God

¹⁹"There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. ²⁰At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores ²¹and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores.

²²"The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. ²³In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. ²⁴So he called to him, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.'

²⁵"But Abraham replied, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. ²⁶And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.'

²⁷"He answered, 'Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my father's house, ²⁸for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.'

²⁹"Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.'

³⁰" 'No, father Abraham,' he said, 'but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.'

³¹"He said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.' "

This is the Word of God and It can be trusted. Thanks be to God

Let us pray:

Lord, we thank you for the goodness and grace you provide for each of us. Today, as we gather to hear your Word, we simply ask that you speak to our hearts and tell us of eternal things. Prepare our hearts to receive a message that will enrich your Will and Way for our lives. In the name of your Son, our Savior, we pray. Amen.

A man decided his wife was getting hard of hearing. So he called her doctor to make an appointment to have her hearing checked. The doctor said he could see her in two weeks, but meanwhile there was a simple, informal test the husband could perform to give the doctor some idea of the seriousness of the problem.

“Here’s what you do,” he said. “Stand about 40 feet away from her, and speak in a normal conversational tone and see if she hears you. If not, go to 30 feet, then 20 feet, and so on until you get a response.”

That evening his wife was in the kitchen cooking dinner, and he’s was in the living room, and he says to himself, “I’m about 40 feet away, let’s see what happens.”

“Honey, what’s for supper?” No response.

So he moves to the other end of the room, about 30 feet away.

“Honey, what’s for supper?” No response.

So he moves into the dining room, about 20 feet away. “Honey, what’s for supper?” No response.

On to the kitchen door, only 10 feet away. “Honey, what’s for supper?” No response.

So he walks right up behind her. “Honey, what’s for supper?”

She turns around and says, “For the FIFTH time, CHICKEN!!!!”

Isn’t that the way it is sometimes in our lives? We are either deaf to what really is going on, failing to perceive reality, or we think it is the other person’s problem when really it is our own. Sometimes, we have selective hearing - we hear what we only want to hear.

Or we act as if we are listening but really our attention is elsewhere. You've had that feeling, haven't you, when someone is giving you eye attention but you know they are not listening, not hearing you at all? It can be very frustrating. It isn't always intentional, I know. You can ask Chris and he will testify to the fact that if the TV is on in the living room you can pretty much say anything to me or about me and I probably won't respond. It isn't that I don't genuinely care about what is being said or about those in the room with me, but I allow the distraction of the TV to drown out everything else around me.

Today's passage speaks specifically about a man who allows the distractions of his own life to drown out everything around him. In our reading we are told that this rich man, in all his fine clothing and wealth was so attentive to the wealth of his life that he didn't even notice Lazarus, a poor beggar laying at his table waiting for just a scrap to fall from the table so he may be fed. I am sure that many who have read this story will tell you that the rich man was evil and harsh. To paraphrase the story would have some individuals telling you that the story was about the abusiveness that the rich man intentionally inflicted on Lazarus, but there is *no* indication here that the rich man made any conscious effort to do harm to Lazarus. However, his indifference alone was enough to rob this poor beggar of any grace from his table.

How many of us today find ourselves being indifferent to the world. A homeless man on the street sits quietly hoping for someone to offer him a little hospitality and grace and yet of the hundreds who pass by him each afternoon maybe, just maybe 10 to 12 people will acknowledge him with a gift of compassion, while the remaining passersby hardly even acknowledge his existence at all. If they do acknowledge him it is usually long enough to ensure they don't trip over him as they walk on by. But it is not just the homeless who are marginalized in this way. It is also the elderly, the poor, our young people dressed in tight fitting jeans and facial piercings,

and sadly it is also most anyone of color who are simply ignored for simply existing in a state that we find unacceptable.

Genesis 1:3 – 4 says, “And God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and He separated the light from the darkness.” Do we, in all of our self serving attitudes and piety not realize that the very light from which God created something out of nothing is the same light that resides within each of us; ALL of us. Yet somewhere along the way, between the Creation stories of Genesis to today we have allowed ourselves to be distracted by the things of this world and the we have allowed the shiny and new of material existence to mask the Light of God in our world. One of my students approached me Friday to ask if I had seen the moon that morning. “Well, yes. You do realize that the moon is always there?” “No it’s not,” one girl in the class began to explain. “It moves to the other side of the Earth.” Ummm, no it doesn’t. The moon is in fact, always there. We don’t always see it because the light of the sun outshines its presence. We don’t see the moon, or at least we don’t notice it during the day because there is something brighter that holds our attention. For the rich man, his wealth and stature out masked the presence of Lazarus at his table and our own entitlement, however misdirected it may be, masks our noticing those who are in need around us; even those who may be begging at your tables.

Another Genesis story tells us about Moses who had sought refuge in the desert. Moses was a man of entitlement, but an unfortunate series of events had lead to the death of man and now he found himself broken and separated from the distractions of his life. It was just Moses, the desert and this burning bush. Burning bush? Yes, you heard me. A bush encrusted in flames, however the bush was not consumed by the flames. It was the light of God manifested before Moses and from within the bush, God spoke. “Take of your sandals! Don’t you know

that the ground you are standing on is Holy Ground?" Now the ground on which Moses stood was nothing new. It was in the same ground that had existed there for centuries, since Creation itself, yet Moses was now presented with the realization that where he was standing was Holy. Isn't all of Creation, everywhere we stand, in fact *Holy Ground*? Of course it is. Why? It is *Holy* because it is the very Creation of God. How many burning bushes do we pass by each day because we fail to allow ourselves to see the World around us for what it really is; God's Creation. How many blessings do we ignore, healings do we miss and opportunities to serve do we forfeit simply because the voices we attend to each day are the voices radiating from the distractions of our World, rather than listening to the burning bush voices of God in our lives.

For the rich man in our story this morning it was too late for him by the time he realized what life is really about. It isn't about the riches of our existence. It isn't about setting ourselves apart from those around us, but rather it is about serving, encouraging, loving and protecting one another. The rich man had allowed the voice of God in his life to be overpowered by the voices of the world and in turn he missed out on the eternal blessings of God. We know this because we are told that, "In hell, he was tormented . . ."

Now hell is a scary thing, as well it should be. But let's look at this with awareness, not fear. Hell is not a place that we should seek to avoid simply because we have our own interest and well being in mind. If that were the case, then we instantly fall back into the line of thinking that placed the rich man there to begin with. Rather, let us not seek to avoid but rather to serve. In serving others; in listening to the Prophets, Moses and the teachings of Christ we learn that we are not called to self interest and self reliance, but rather we are called to nurture the light of Christ; to see the forest despite the trees, if you will.

'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.' (v. 31) Do you see the foreshadowing that Christ is using here? If we fail to listen to what is so obviously being spoken to each of us by the one's that God has sent to us, then how can we ever come to know the voice of God, even in the form of the Risen Son of God?

I invite each of you today to seek, explore and listen for the voice of God in each of your lives. Read your Bible, study God's Word, listen to the cries of the oppressed, share in the joys of those who have found healing in their lives, and most importantly listen for that still small voice that resides within each of you. There are a lot of voices out there telling you who you are, what you should want and who you should be. What voice are you listening to? What are you hearing?

As we sing our sermon hymn today, I remind you that this altar is always open and you are welcome to come this morning for a time of prayer; a time of listening for the voices of love and power free from the distractions of this World. Won't you come as we sing?

In the greatness of God's Creation, let us not forget that though we are small, God Created humankind for companionship and that God loves each of us; all of us, no matter what our earthly flesh may produce. Amen.