



ST. STEPHEN'S ANGLICAN CHURCH

11856 MAYS CHAPEL RD., TIMONIUM, MD 21093

The First Sunday in Trinity Season
Sunday June 22, 2014

✠ In The Name of The Father and of The Son and of The Holy Ghost. Amen.

The parable opens by Jesus telling us:

“There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day, and there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores, and desiring to be fed with crumbs which fell from the rich man’s table.”

This parable is one of the most regularly hijacked and misused passages in the Bible. Every social welfare movement or liberation theology adopts Lazarus as its standard bearer and converts this parable into political capital. The goal is to draft Jesus into their movement, and retroactively imply his support for a social/political agenda. But this Gospel has nothing to do with anyone’s political or social agenda.

The rich man does not go to hell because he is rich. Lazarus does not go to Heaven because he is impoverished and has sores. Poverty is not more inherently holy than wealth, although wealth can make certainly make holiness difficult. The rich man’s sin is not that he has gifts, but how he uses his gifts.

It is interesting to note that the man is rich, and yet Lazarus does not beg for money. He is royally appareled, but the practically naked Lazarus does not ask for clothes. The rich man eats sumptuously from his table, and crumbs are all that Lazarus desires. The sin is not that the rich man turned Lazarus away when he begged. The sin is that he did not recognize and respond to Lazarus before he had to beg. This is not a parable about an incident of greed, it is a parable about a character of greed.

This greed, which is condemned, can come in three forms. It can be prideful greed, the belief that one deserves the bounty of their life, and that the exclusive consumption of gifts is the distinct privilege of someone who believes that privilege is the symbol of righteousness. It can be self absorption, being so

involved with the details of our consumption that we don’t even see the need around us. That form is very common today, though it might be portrayed as total absorption in one’s phone and texts at the expense of noticing there are people around us that need to talk and be touched. Greed can also be a crisis of faith. Hoarding what we have in this world because we fear to be dependent on God’s grace in time of want. That miserliness and hoarding is also a form of pride. It makes us the salvation of our destinies instead of trusting God that what we give will be returned, and not only returned, but returned seven fold and brimming over.

Most importantly, this parable is not just about earthly treasure. Certainly, the way we dispose of our abundance is a meaningful indicator of our character, but the condemnation of the rich man is not about his handling of pork chops and cherry pie. The particular symbols Jesus chooses in this parable are not accidental. He could have chosen any trapping of wealth to condemn a selfish man, but the images He chose are particular sacramental symbols. He uses the Table and the Crumbs.

Why did Jesus choose that image of the table? In the common vernacular, what’s is “on one’s table” is what is important in someone’s life at that moment. In cards, the moment when deception stops and the truth revealed is when the cards are laid “on the table”. At Thanksgiving, there is the kid’s table and the adult’s table. At weddings and important affairs we are ranked by our position in relation to the head table. Jesus even illustrates His admonition that “the first shall be last, and the last shall be first”, by referring to the place we take at the banquet table.

The table that is the object of this parable is the Heavenly Table. The Heavenly Table has always been the altar. The Table is where the memorial we are commanded to celebrate after the Last Supper on Holy Thursday is celebrated. It is the manifestation

through all time that Son of God was once and ever is offered for our sins. It is the place where the Sacrifice of Calvary is made present for us to share today. The rich man is clad in purple, the color of royalty. The royal table of the parable is the table that is set before you in this Church, and in every Church that celebrates the Royal and Real Presence of our Lord on the altar.

You notice that the rich man does not have a name. The poor man does, but not the rich man. The reason is that the rich man is not a specific person. He represents the people of the Holy Table. In the historical context of the parables, the audience was the Pharisees. In the eternal context of Christ's presence, the rich man is the Pharisee of the New Covenant, which means the parable is about us. If we understand the Table in this way, we can understand why it is that the crumbs that fall from the table that are so important.

The wealth of the Church is not our assets, our buildings or our art. It is not our linens or our royal robes. It is what is set before us on our Holy Table. Outside our doors, lays the beggar of this world, the not yet Baptized, covered with the sores of original sin and desperate for a crumb from our Holy Table.

Doesn't the fact that it is a crumb that is desired say it all? Where does a crumb come from except bread, and what is Bread to Christian, but the Spiritual Manna, the Bread of Life, the Mystical Body of Our Lord. In just a few minutes, we will kneel before the elements about to be Consecrated and say:

“We do not presume to come to this thy table, O merciful Lord, trusting in our own righteousness, but in thy manifold and great mercies. We are not worthy to gather up the crumbs that are under thy Table, But thou art the same Lord whose property is always to have mercy.”

Though we are not worthy, like Lazarus, we are lifted from the foot of the table and seated at the Heavenly banquet by the grace of Jesus Christ.

We have been made the stewards of the wealth of Heaven. We are, in our spirit, the rich man. If we do not give the beggar at our door the bread on our Table, the way that the Lord offers us the Bread from His, then the judgment of the rich man will be our judgment. Torments of flame, across the veil, in the place where no comfort can be given, will be our reward.

In the Epistle, St. John tells us that we know Love only because God loved us. How we take the

love that has been sacrificed for us on the heavenly table and share it with the Lazarus of our own lives is the way we reflect the love Godly love we have been given to the world.

We have to think about the people outside the Church. We have to pray for them. We have to tell them that we love them. Most importantly, we have to show them that we love them reaching out to tend to their festering, repulsive sores, both physical and especially Spiritual. We have to share the crumbs from the table at which we have been seated by grace.

God has a plan and purpose for every gift that He has given us. We have so much at St Stephen's that our gifts cannot, and should not, be contained in this building. We have the Mystical sacrament, we have the comfort of Scripture, beautiful music, incredible fellowship, love for each other that wants to spilled over the brim of our cup to our families and friends and the people in our lives who are still locked in loneliness and fear and darkness.

We can't make the mistake of telling ourselves we don't have enough, God has blessed us well and will continue to do so for your faithful devotion. If it was possible to hold a mirror up to St. Stephen's as a parish, the picture that would be reflected would be clothed in purple, and the banquet on our table would be sumptuous. If the mirror were large enough, we would see Lazarus at our door. Our Lazarus would be un-churched family, friends and co-workers, starving for the healing love of Christ and hope of life. It requires awareness, sensitivity, courage and grace to open the door of our banquet hall to suffering Lazarus, but that is what we are supposed to do.

Jesus tells the rich man his brothers can't be saved except by the prophets and the Scriptures, even though one would come back from the dead. In our lives, even though Jesus has come back from the dead for us, there are people who still do not believe, who are still not saved. But their plight is not hopeless. They have the Scriptures and the witness of our lives, our testimony and our compassion, that will turn them from the destructive and desperate path of self reliance. Their hunger can be satisfied and their lives converted, if we open the table set in our Church and in our hearts and invite Lazarus in to share the banquet with us.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen