

Sermon for Proper 21C  
Sunday, September 25, 2022  
“Whom do you fail to see?”

Texts: Amos 6:1, 4-7; 1 Timothy 6:6-19; Luke 16:19-31

I speak to you in the name of the one true God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

*Poor man Lazarus, sick and disabled,  
dip your finger in the water;  
come and cool my tongue,  
'cause I'm tormented in the flame!  
He had to eat crumbs from the rich man's table  
dip your finger in the water;  
come and cool my tongue,  
'cause I'm tormented in the flame!*

*Refrain:  
I'm tormented in the flame!  
I'm tormented in the flame!  
Dip your finger in the water;  
come and cool my tongue,  
'cause I'm tormented in the flame!*

*Rich man Divies, he lived so well.  
Dip your finger in the water;  
come and cool my tongue,  
'cause I'm tormented in the flame!  
And when he died, he went straight to hell.  
Dip your finger in the water;  
come and cool my tongue,  
'cause I'm tormented in the flame! [Refrain]*

*I love to shout, I love to sing.  
Dip your finger in the water;  
come and cool my tongue,  
'cause I'm tormented in the flame!  
I love to praise my heavenly King.  
Dip your finger in the water;  
come and cool my tongue,  
'cause I'm tormented in the flame! [Refrain]*

Today's gospel lesson continues the important message that riches aren't necessarily bad, but rather, it's what you do with the riches with which God has blessed you. As St. Paul wrote in his first letter to Timothy, we 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 [we] may take hold of the life that really is life.” Worldly wealth might offer stability and luxury, but we must avoid temptation,

especially, as our Gospel points out, the tendency to show indifference or ignore those in need.

In the parable, there is a rich man and a poor man named Lazarus. The rich man is dressed in fine linen and purple—the color of luxury, privilege, and royalty—while Lazarus, covered in sores, lays at his gate. Hungry, Lazarus begs for the crumbs from the rich man’s table and is unsatisfied, but the dogs of the rich man lick the sores of Lazarus. Take note of an important feature of this story: the poor man has a name and the rich man does not. In scripture, important people have names; insignificant ones do not. Then the parable goes on to say that Lazarus, whose name means “the one whom God helps,” and the rich man are carried away in death: Lazarus, by angels to heaven into the bosom of Abraham—the one with whom God’s great covenant was made—and the rich man, who has no name, ends up alone in Hades. Now, it is the rich man who is begging, and he is asking Abraham to allow Lazarus to dip his finger in the water of the river between heaven and hell and cool his tongue, for he is being tormented in the flame. Abraham’s answer? “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.” On earth, the rich man was indifferent to Lazarus; he did not see Lazarus, but from Hades, he saw him clearly, but it was too late.

Whom do we fail to see in our own time and place? In what ways do we show indifference to the less fortunate? Each of us encounters, daily, the Lazaruses of our own time: the people whose names we often do not know, those begging on the streets, the marginalized, shunned, ignored, and often forgotten. Even when we do offer help, most never get our attention. And we also go around showing indifference: indifference to the victims of disaster, violence, injustice, sexism, racism, classism, and all of the other “isms” we can name. All too often the people and the powers of this world fail to see the humanity in others and act out in many unhealthy ways, unleashing violence, tragedy, war, violation of human rights, political conflict, and allowing the gap between rich and poor to widen. Many disregard those who are different or come from someplace else. We harbor bad attitudes and allow fractured relationships with those we supposedly care about to continue. When we do things like these, we are like the rich man in the parable—and the words of Amos warn us about how that will turn out for us. When we are the recipients of such treatment, we are like poor Lazarus.

But God expects transformation from us. God doesn’t want us to end up like the rich man. He wants us to change our lives. He expects us always to see the image of God in our sisters and brothers, even those who seem to hate us—that’s the really hard one to do. God calls us to fight for justice, equality, equity, respect, and uplifting of those in need, less fortunate, or victimized. Imagine how much better our world would be if we all saw the image of God in everyone else, if we all valued the humanity that dwells inside each and every one of us? We might actually see an end to wars, tensions, racism, inequality, hatred, and animosity between each other. Let us pray that God will open our eyes so that we see him in ourselves and everyone. Amen.

## Resources

“Poor Man Lazarus” song by Jester Hairston, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UKJH5mC6jvw>

*Feasting on the Word* for Proper 21 (Year C, Volume 4)

Barbara Rossing, “Commentary on Luke 16:13-31” in *The Working Preacher*,  
[http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=2983](http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=2983)

Janet H. Hunt, “God is my help: Seeing Lazarus” in *Dancing with the Word*,  
<http://words.dancingwiththeword.com/2016/09/god-is-my-help-seeing-lazarus.html>

“Lazarus,” <http://biblehub.com/greek/2976.htm>

“9/29 Readings: A Rule for the Rich,” [https://livingchurch.org/2019/09/24/9-29-readings-a-rule-for-the-rich/?utm\\_source=The+Living+Church+Email+Updates&utm\\_campaign=1179200f6c-EMAIL\\_CAMPAIGN\\_2022\\_09\\_15\\_09\\_33&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=0\\_0826f52b83-1179200f6c-128527886](https://livingchurch.org/2019/09/24/9-29-readings-a-rule-for-the-rich/?utm_source=The+Living+Church+Email+Updates&utm_campaign=1179200f6c-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2022_09_15_09_33&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_0826f52b83-1179200f6c-128527886)