

I have been following the lectionary passages pretty closely in my preaching over the past few weeks. These are the passages of Scripture which are assigned to each Sunday of the year. Last week we read from the beginning of chapter 16 of Luke.

The 16<sup>th</sup> chapter begins with Jesus saying these words, "There was a rich man ..." Today we are going to be reading a story that Jesus shares from the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> chapter of the gospel of Luke. We once again here Jesus saying, "There was a rich man..."

### **Read Luke 16:19-31**

I shared this story on Wednesday night when I stopped in on the Sophia Talks women's study and I am pretty sure I have shared it in a sermon here before. But in light of recent events in Charlotte I think it is a great story to help us get some insight.

The main character in this story was not me but Lindsay Gladden Capistran who sits over here in the choir. A long time ago when Lindsay was but a mere teenager, she and I went on a mission trip to Honduras. I was the adult chaperone and she was one of the teenagers on the trip.

We spent our week working construction on a house. Lindsay was a very hard working volunteer that week. Anyone who knows Lindsay is not surprised by that. It was dry and it was dusty as we worked on laying brick and putting in windows along the side of this dusty mountain in Tegucigalpa, Honduras.

I recall that trip because I remember my American arrogance in telling the bricklayer that I could do his job as well as he could and to let me show him. After trying to lay my second row of bricks and completely messing up how to do it he took the brick and trowel from me so that he could do it correctly. I was fired that day. And he was right. Laying brick correctly is not as easy as it may look. And I was messing it all up.

We worked Monday through Friday. Our group of 5 teenagers and 2 adults finished up our work around lunchtime on Friday. We were given a couple of options for lunch including going to the food court at the local mall. Our group chose the food court.

We did not have time or desire to change from our grungy clothing or wash our dusty faces. We figured, who cares. We are in the Third World. This is a poor country and we are the generous Americans who have come down to help them make their lives better. We don't need to look nice to go to the mall here.

We did not realize until we arrived at the mall that we had arrived at the Honduran version of the upscale SouthPark Mall in Charlotte. Everything about this mall looked and felt like a typical upscale US mall. There were many of the same stores that we recognized. There were lots of good looking and cool teenagers and adults walking around and shopping.

The food court contained many of the same restaurants that we would see at a US mall. Being middle class white American youth and adults in an upscale mall was our comfort zone. We knew how to act. We knew where to sit. We knew we were welcomed. We knew we fit in. And we were wrong.

The teenagers in our group said they wanted to walk around the mall. "Sure," the adult leaders said. So this group of 5 dusty American white kids wearing ragged clothes and smelling from their volunteer work that day set out to walk through the upscale mall in Central America. They did not pay attention to being a racial minority of whites kids in a mall filled with Hispanics. They did not feel they were different.

As this group entered into a clothing store they noticed something that they did not expect. As they walked through the clothing store they noticed that the Hispanic clerk followed them through the store. It was clear to these kids that their race and appearance made them appear suspicious to her. She kept a close eye on these 5 white American teenagers to make sure they did not steal anything from the store.

When I hear about racial profiling my mind immediately goes to this experience in Honduras when 5 middle class white kids who looked a certain way discovered what it feels like to be profiled by race and class.

Like I also shared to the Sophia Talks group, I have been pulled over twice in my blue Honda Civic. My blue Honda Civic with the dark shaded windows looks like the type of car that a drug dealer would drive. In both instances when I have been pulled over and rolled down my windows the officer appeared quite surprised to see an old white guy staring back at him. Neither officer gave me a ticket.

These are my experiences that I share. No one can understand what it is like to be me except me. But today in this country we have a difficult time listening to each other tell of our individual experiences. We quickly assume that we know what it is like to be you. And if we perceive “you” to be quite different than “me” then we will make assumptions about “you.”

We make assumptions about “you” without sitting down and listening to “you.” We are quick to form our opinions on who “you” are and why “you” do what you do without trying to understand what experiences have made “you.”

We have read a passage of Scripture today which is about chasms. In this passage a rich man dressed with the finest of clothes who eats the best of foods does not pay attention to the poor man outside of his gated community. The rich man lived life to the fullest while the poor man was so poor that even the dogs licked his sores.

This story that Jesus tells is the same story that we see in our culture played out over and over again. We know that there are certain neighborhoods that we are told to avoid. We know that there are certain areas of town that we are told to stay away from. We know that there are certain groups of people that we have been told that we are not to trust. We put these labels on one another. We make assumptions about one another. We make assumptions about people based on class, race, and religion.

Someone I know who describes himself as somewhat liberal recently bought a pocketknife. This person went into a local store and went up to the counter where the pocketknives were located. The sales clerk came over and began to assist my friend. My friend said the clerk was very helpful and my friend felt good about his selection. And then my friend said, "I wonder if he would have been as helpful if he knew I was so liberal." Assumptions made about the other without conversation. Both ways.

Jesus, in this story that he tells that Luke records, says that these divisions that we create have eternal consequences. Because both the rich man and the poor man die. We are told that the poor man goes to be with the faithful servants of God like Abraham.

And we are told that the rich man goes to hell. All we are told about these two men is that one is rich and that one is poor. The poor man spends eternity with God and God's faithful followers and the rich man goes to hell. All that we are told is that the rich man ignores the man who is poor.

In this place of eternity, the rich man is tormented. It is now that he sees that the roles have been reversed. The poor man is in a place of comfort and the rich man is in a place of torment. In this place of eternity the rich man tries everything he can to cross this chasm to the place of comfort. But he is told that this cannot happen. The rules cannot be changed even though he regrets not noticing the poor among him when they lived on earth.

The rich man then says, "Well at least let's warn the others. We need to warn others that the well to do need to pay attention to the ones at the bottom of the economic ladder. Let me warn my family members at least." But this rich man is then told, "Sorry." The messages are out there. It is the responsibility of the ones in privilege to listen and act.

Those of us today may think that doing nothing today is an option. And it is an option. We can continue to live in our exclusive communities and listen to the voices like ours that confirm what we think we already know. But we are warned by Jesus that ignoring the pain and injustice of others has eternal consequences.

We can be part of the solution to bridge the chasms that exist between us. And there are simple ways to do this and more difficult ways to bridge these chasms. The simple ways are to be mindful of how you treat others near you that may be people that are on the outside in some way. Treat people who seem to have less with more respect than you treat people who seem to have more. Initiate conversations with people that appear different than you in some way that shows respect and a desire to understand.

And there are deeper ways to bridge these chasms in our culture. Actively initiate ministries that seek to bring together people that are separated in some way. Our church Session has just voted to begin a relationship with Chester Park School in Chester.

Chester County is in a different place economically than York County. Rather than blaming Chester County for this we need to begin to understand the history that creates these types of situations in adjoining counties. And we don't begin this relationship with a desire to make ourselves feel good about ourselves but because we are called to bridge divides in our culture. If you want to find ways to be a part of this partnership then let me know and I can put you in contact with the right people.

We don't have to build these types of bridges. We can continue to watch the same channels that reaffirm our set beliefs. We can continue to listen to the same people that think like we do. We can continue to hang out with people like us. We can continue to live on the inside of the walls that we build to keep others out.

But Jesus gives us a warning. In the story that Jesus tells, the man with all of the resources who does not use them to assist others spends eternity in hell. While the man without the resources on earth ends up spending eternity with God. How we treat others on earth has eternal consequences. AMEN.

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-Given: September 25, 2016 in Allison Creek Presbyterian and also at Worship-4-Youth at Bethelwoods.