



## Sermon for the 16<sup>th</sup> Week of Pentecost, September 25, 2022

St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Coeur d'Alene The Rev. Dr. David Gortner

[Jeremiah 32:1-3a, 6-15](#)

[Psalms 91:1-6, 14-16](#)

[1 Timothy 6:6-19](#)

[Luke 16:19-31](#)

Good morning! Welcome to St. Luke's, and welcome to Fall. I love this time of year.

This morning, we heard remarkable scripture texts. I want to dive right in to them together with you. Let's begin with Jeremiah.

Here's what we hear this morning. In the midst of a time when everything is falling apart in his country, the prophet Jeremiah gets an unusual call from God.

When rulers are in trouble, when outside threats are tearing the country apart, when life among people within the country is coming apart at the seams – when people are already being deported and carried away as prizes of war – Jeremiah, a prophet scorned for telling the truth of the situation his country is in, hears God nudge him about a cousin who is going to offer him land. The cousin arrives, just as Jeremiah had sensed might happen, and offers him a plot of family land. All of this while the whole country is being occupied and taken over, piece by piece, by a foreign power. And Jeremiah senses God nudging him, “Go ahead and buy the land. Do all the legal steps and sign the deed. Then tuck away that deed and store it in a place where it will last. Because, I promise – your people will return to this land and it will be yours again.”

What will be your legacy?

Where might God be nudging you to pour out your trust and hope as an investment – even in the face of what may look like a gloomy future?

Times are upon us now that raise our anxieties. US medical leaders have recommended screening all people under age 65 for heightened anxiety, as a concern for widespread mental health, because of what they observe day after day in their offices and hospitals and out in the worlds of work. There's that pandemic that certainly raised our anxieties across the world as we faced an unknown and wily destructive enemy. There's the worldwide economic problems that have unfolded in the past few years that we have not seen in a generation, and that are different than before. There's the war in Ukraine brought on by Russia, with impact around the world. We see rising temperatures, increased powerful storms, and more fires and disappearing shorelines across the globe. Housing prices everywhere are exceed working people's ability to live even paycheck to paycheck. And people have gotten overheated and hostile and threatening in their public engagement about issues of our common life. Life is definitely simmering with anxiety in the worlds around us.

What will be your legacy?

What might God be nudging you, me, us together, to do even in such a time as this?

Nothing we have will go with us beyond the short time we have in this life. As the Apostle says in I Timothy, “We brought nothing into the world, so that we can take nothing out of it.” For whatever time we have, we may receive or earn or gain resources. But those resources – that wealth of any kind – cannot be buried and transported with us when we die.

What will be our legacy? What will we dare to offer the world we leave behind us, not matter where we go?

Instead of preparing for exile by trading any of his savings into Assyrian money or carrying with him a hidden stockpile of gold, Jeremiah dares to follow God’s prompting and invest what he has in land that he will likely never return to claim himself – but to have record stored in safe keeping, like the scrolls of scripture found thousands of years later in clay jars that kept light and water out, as an act of defiance against the cruelty of conquering armies and the decline of his own people, as an act of stubborn hope and trust in God’s promises.

So, people build schools. People buy land and build places for healing and rehabilitation. People invest in others’ futures. People give to churches and faith communities. Even when the signs all around them stir up images of decline and enfolding chaos.

The scriptures today are one more reminder that our resources – our wealth, our energy, our investments and efforts – are all passing. What we do with them today says something about who we really are. What we do with them today has consequences for ourselves and others.

Last week, in Luke’s Gospel, we heard Jesus conclude some stories and teachings with that famous line, “You cannot serve God and wealth.” You cannot have two masters. You cannot have two Gods. There is one God, and it is not money.

But money – and any kind of wealth, economic goodies, things we own – can become an unspoken god. Throughout the Gospels and especially in the Gospel of Luke, we find Jesus warning his followers of the ways that money can seduce and twist and distort our thoughts and motivations.

Today, from Luke’s Gospel, we hear Jesus tell a story. It is a story that sounded very familiar to the people of Jesus’ day. There are rich people living in gated houses everywhere, in every society. And there are people begging for food and suffering from untreated ailments everywhere, in every society. In Jesus’ day, poor folks on the streets would have known where to perch and beg. In the marketplaces. Near the temples. Near places with water springs and wells and pools. Along the roads. And, maybe especially, picking out some prime spots at entrances to palaces and wealthy homes – it might be possible to score an occasional really good handout from people who lived or work in the homes of the rich.

Lazarus knew such a spot and sat day after day in hope for just a bit of food from the rich man’s overflowing table that was heavy with more food than would be eaten. The rich man was living into the values of his day. Living large was a way of showing the world around you the ways that the gods had blessed you and given you favored status in the world.

And the rich man, day after day, makes a practice of not even seeing Lazarus at his doorstep. Day after day, he makes a choice – and then, the choice becomes a habit – of not seeing, not sharing, not treating the wounds of someone at his gate.

After both men die, Lazarus is in the comfort of embrace in the bosom of Abraham. He is in the company of the children of Abraham who have followed the way of God. The rich man is buried and is in Hades, far from that company. He is in torment. And he looks across a great distance and sees Abraham with Lazarus resting against him.

Wait a minute. So, the rich man recognized Lazarus? So he did see him! During his life, he did see the man at his doorstep asking for food and help.

There is a way of seeing without seeing, right? It is possible to go through our lives not seeing things and people and patterns around us. It turns out that we have actually seen and have made a choice that is repeatedly conscious not to see. We do this with racial inequities that have been built into our laws and patterns of trade. We do this with people who are not like us. We perceive, but we dismiss what we see. We see, but we are still not seeing, because we have not learned to see truly.

The rich man then calls out – not to Lazarus, but to Abraham. He asks Abraham to send Lazarus (and the rich man knows Lazarus' name!) to bring him just a bit of water to relieve his burning torment. When that request cannot be met, he asks that Lazarus be sent to his family's house to warn those still living of what may lie ahead for them. This is the first request mention of the rich man's concern for anyone beyond himself.

But notice something here. The rich man recognizes Lazarus and knows him by name – but he is only approaching Lazarus as someone beneath him, still, after death, even when Lazarus is in the blessed place and he is in the place of torment. He does not address Lazarus directly, because Lazarus is beneath him. He asks Abraham to send Lazarus like a servant or slave.

The rich man still cannot see what is fully plain before his eyes. He cannot see Lazarus as someone equal to himself and to all other people. He cannot make the leap to view Lazarus with respect and dignity.

The Apostle writing in I Timothy gets it right: “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.” As we heard Jesus say last week, “You cannot serve God and wealth.” When we let money become the hidden, unspoken god it has become in our world and society, our minds become twisted and mutated by the concerns and distractions that money brings, and we lose our perspective on what truly matters.

I cannot help but think that this great chasm dividing the rich man from the place of eternal rest with Abraham and Lazarus is a chasm of his own making. I cannot help but think that the rich man has made his own hell. I cannot help but think that we make our own hell with the thoughts and attitudes and beliefs and things we cling to that bind us and blind us and distance us and sever us from God, others, and our own selves.

This kind of chasm doesn't just disappear or evaporate as we pass from this life to what lies ahead. Over the span of years that it takes, the rich man will find himself in torment until he is ready to shed what binds him

and burns at him from the inside. When the rich man calls out to Abraham and the blessed place of rest, and to God almighty, not out of desperation for relief but with a heart of repentance – when he calls out, “Oh, God, Have mercy on me, I am sorry, I see now and I am willing to see what I denied for so long,” then he can see that the chasm will close, and the hand of Lazarus will reach out to grasp his own and draw him into the kingdom.

What is our legacy, each of us? It begins now, it begins in this life as we open ourselves and our wealth and resources to others around us. It begins now, as we open our eyes and hearts to see, as we let go of what binds and blinds us.

There is a saint we celebrate and remember in our Christian tradition. His name was Martin of Tours. He was a soldier, a cavalry soldier in military service for Rome in the 300s. He had recently become a Christian and knew the scriptures and the stories of Jesus Christ. As he rode one day in the countryside, he saw an older man nearly naked in the cold. Martin got down, took his sword, and cut his own cloak in two so that the naked man had something warm to wear. Later, Martin had a vision where he saw Christ Jesus wearing the half-cloak that he had cut for the old man. Martin saw that the old man was Christ, Immanuel, God-with-us right in front of him.

Friends, what is our legacy? Our legacy is how we respond to the opportunities around us, day by day. The opportunity to open our eyes, and our hearts and hands and doors, is at our gates – by name of Lazarus, who is really the presence of Christ Jesus – Christ is there every day, for us to seek, to serve, and to see and welcome.