

Sermon

Karma...

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Bacon Memorial Presbyterian Church

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In the time of Luke, during the height of the Roman Empire, society was marked by a staggering divide between the rich and the poor—much like the world we inhabit today. While some feasted in luxury, others struggled to survive, competing with stray dogs for mere scraps. The parable in Luke 16:19–31 may read like an ancient tale, but it speaks directly to our present reality. We can dismiss it as distant myth, or we can confront its truth: despite the passage of millennia, humanity continues to live within systems that elevate a few while leaving many behind.

Yet God intervenes in today's scripture in a profound way. God has given Lazarus an eternity of a nirvana and the greedy man, an eternity of hell. Even when the man pleads with God for some relief or to warn his family of their fate should they follow his path, God redirects him to the same teachings afforded to all of us – the commandments.

Do you think people today are concerned about the salvation of their souls? Do you think people focus on their spiritual existence both here and in the afterlife or is there more emphasis on having the opulence of earthly life?

You see, to live into the commandments means it is impossible to ignore those who suffer both near and around us and beyond. And today, here in our own country, we have devalued some while protecting extreme wealth for others. There has been a significant retreat from the values of all

Inspired by [workingpreacher.org](https://www.workingpreacher.org) commentary on Luke 16:19-31 by Rev John T. Carroll.

Abrahamic traditions leaving an opportunity for other non-Christian values to permeate our world.

Let's return to our gospel lesson for some answers. This is a tale of two men living on two opposite extremes of life. In this story, the rich man isn't given a name—but the poor man does. His name is Lazarus, which comes from the name Eliezer, meaning "God is my help." That's powerful, because Lazarus is the only person Jesus ever names in any of His parables—aside from Abraham, who's part of this one too. That tells us something important. Lazarus had nothing, no support, no comfort, no dignity in life. But he had one thing that mattered most: God. And in the end, it's God—and only God—who comes through for him.

These two men lived worlds apart—one wrapped in luxury, the other barely surviving. But everything shifts in verse 22. Death shows up, and suddenly the tables begin to turn. Lazarus, the poor man, is carried by angels to be with Abraham. The rich man? He gets a proper burial, something Lazarus likely never received. But then the rich man finds himself in Hades, the place of the dead, and he looks up and sees Lazarus—far off, right beside Abraham.

What follows is a conversation between the rich man and "Father Abraham." It's full of family language—Abraham calls him "child," and the man appeals to his heritage. But here's the thing: being part of Abraham's family isn't enough. Just claiming the lineage doesn't guarantee a spot in God's kingdom. John the Baptist warned about this earlier in Luke's Gospel: it's not about who you're descended from—it's about how you live. Even in Abraham's family, character and compassion still matter.

And here in lies the difference – how you live matters. No matter what our lot in life may be, no matter how privileged we have been either in resources and provisions or a family of means or even being raised in a faith, which in my opinion, is a privilege because many are not anymore. They are lacking in knowledge of stories like this and understanding what it means to “love like Jesus”. They are not involved in community outreach nor do they think in those terms.

One common thread they are finding in mass shooters and assassins is a sense of isolation and getting most of their knowledge from social media and the internet. Now for those of you who may not know it or be as familiar, social media has algorithms that are put in place for several reasons, one of which is for your pleasure. If you read, view or like certain things, it learns what you like and will direct more posts like that into your feed – and that even includes your friends. If you have somebody who you rarely like what they post, you won’t see them in your feed very often. And it’s true for reels and tic toc videos as well...and this is where it gets a little dangerous. You are being controlled and young minds can easily be persuaded...maybe our old minds can as well.

So not being given spiritual education, so to speak, leads to confusion, isolation, mistrust in others, and fear. And ultimately, anger and rage. Feeling like is unfair and you want to set things right. Not willing to wait for Karma to do its work – they take matters into their own hands not in a helpful way, but fearful evil way.

Abraham lays out the heart of the matter—a complete reversal of fortune that echoes something Jesus said earlier in Luke’s Gospel. Remember those words? “Blessed are you who are poor... who are hungry... who weep now.” And then the flip side: “Woe to you who are rich... who are full... who are laughing now.” It’s a powerful reminder that God’s kingdom doesn’t operate by the world’s standards.

But let’s be clear—Lazarus isn’t rewarded just because he was poor, and the rich man isn’t punished simply for being wealthy. This parable points to something deeper. Lazarus receives grace, pure and simple. The story doesn’t even show him doing anything—it’s as if his suffering itself cries out to God. Now, in real life, people living in poverty do make choices, they do have agency—but often within a very narrow set of options shaped by forces beyond their control.

As for the rich man, his downfall isn’t his wealth—it’s what he did, or rather didn’t do, with it. Day after day, he walked past Lazarus lying at his gate and did nothing. He had the means to help, but he chose comfort over compassion. And that’s the warning for us: with privilege comes responsibility. God doesn’t condemn wealth, but He does call us to use it with mercy, with justice, and with love.

For the rich man in the story, the moment to change has passed. His choices are sealed, and even his pleas for his family go unanswered. But what about us? Jesus isn’t just telling a story—He’s holding up a mirror. He’s inviting us to take a hard look at our own lives, our own decisions, and the way we

treat those around us. Because our time isn't unlimited. We only get so many chances to do what's right.

But here's the good news: it's not too late. It's not too late to open our eyes to the suffering at our doorstep. Not too late to use what we've been given—our resources, our influence, our compassion—to help others thrive. Not too late to speak up against systems that reward greed while leaving others in despair. Not too late to reach out to young people in new and meaningful ways to guide them back to the teachings of Christ. Maybe we just need to use the propaganda tool but in a new and light-filled way. People are out there trying to make a difference – we can too! The parable doesn't end with the rich man—it ends with us. The question still hangs in the air: How will we respond?

Let us pray:

Gracious and loving God, We thank You for the truth of Your Word, for stories that challenge us, and for grace that meets us where we are.

Today, we've heard the cry of Lazarus, and we've seen the silence of the rich man. Help us not to turn away from the suffering at our gates. Open our eyes to the needs around us, and open our hearts to respond with compassion.

Teach us to live generously, to use what we have for the good of others, and to walk in the way of justice and mercy. May we not wait until it's too late. May we act now—with courage, with love, and with faith.

And when our time comes, may we be found faithful, resting in Your arms, carried by grace, and welcomed home.

In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

