

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the one who bridges the chasm, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, amen.

We demonstrate a fair bit of generosity around this place. Just look at all these beautiful and functional quilts. Imagine yourself as a refugee, fleeing oppression and violence. You've just left your home and all your worldly possessions behind. You are now totally dependent on the kindness of strangers. People are heading to a tent city built and operated by a world-wide organization called Lutheran World Relief. If only you could get there... After many days on the road you finally arrive and are met by friendly, loving people who welcome you into their camp. You are immediately given food, clean clothing, and shown to a place where you can wash the road grime from your body. You're given a personal care kit with wash cloth soap and a towel to dry off. After you're clean and fed someone shows you to your new temporary home. Yes, it's just a tent you share with 11 other people, but it protects you from the wind and the storms of life. You are shown to your bed. It's just a cot, but its mattress is soft and comfortable. At the foot of the bed you see a beautiful quilt. You're are so tired from all the days of running from the evil you were escaping, you collapse onto the cot, pull the quilt around your shoulders and neck and fall fast asleep. During the fitful night you wake several times thinking they have finally caught up to you and are dragging you back to where you came from, but when you wake up each time you

realize it's just a bad dream. You go back to sleep snuggling your quilt of many colors even tighter than before.

These quilts and Kits you see here today represent a year's worth of work, creative, beautiful work on the part of many people in this congregation. These quilts and kits will keep refugees somewhere in this world warm and clean and these school kits will help children learn so they can have a better life. The personal care kits will give the gift of cleanliness to those refugees who are wearing the dirt and grime of their journey. The Baby Care Kits welcome newborns of these wanderers into this world by showing them someone cared for them. These items before us today are a grand gesture on the part of Trinity Lutheran Church to demonstrate we do see all the Lazarus' at our Gates and we do love them and want to do what we can to make their world a better place.

Our Gospel for today is addressed to the "lovers of money." We know this because right before telling this parable Jesus called out the Pharisees for their love of money... He then tells this parable about a Rich Man and poor Lazarus. The Rich Man's sin wasn't his wealth, it was his love of and how he used his money. He used money to insulate himself from the brokenness of his world. He was addicted to lavish gourmet feasts and intoxicated with the things his wealth could buy. The problem was, he didn't see Lazarus as a human being of the same eternal

worth as he regarded himself. Now, before we all rip the rich man, lets see if he's any different from ourselves on any given day.

The rich man obviously knew who Lazarus was. He even knew his name. My take on this story is that the rich man was probably generous when it suited him. Yet he did not regard Lazarus as a person of worth and value loved by God and someone he should love too. He didn't welcome him into his home, or do anything about his open wounds. Meanwhile, there sits Lazarus at the rich man's gate. In the Greek it says Lazarus was thrown or cast down at the rich man's gate. Some English translations try to capture the scene by saying Lazarus was lain at the gate. The point is, he didn't get there by himself. Someone had to bring Lazarus to the gate in order for him to beg. Guess what, Lazarus was crippled. He wasn't just a lazy bum. He wasn't on skid row because of his bad choices or lack of a good work ethic. He apparently couldn't walk and so had to be brought to the gate of the rich man every day where he longed for the scraps that fell from the rich man's table.

Then the great equalizer occurs, both men die. Lazarus was carried by the angels to the bosom of Father Abraham, the Father of Our Faith and the rich man was buried. I learned an interesting fact this week. The very poor, I mean the really, really poor, whose families were also poor, couldn't afford to be buried. When these poverty-stricken folks died, there was nobody to prepare their bodies.

There was no tomb for their final resting place. When they died, they just laid there in the street or at the gate of a rich man or where ever they passed away until someone got disgusted enough or took pity on the poor dead soul and carried their corpse off to the garbage dump. The people who removed the dead bodies were called angels in Jesus day...

So, this week as I re-read this parable, I was reminded of the Christmas Carole by Charles Dickins. Tiny Tim as Lazarus and Ebenezer Scrooge as the Rich Man. The good news for Scrooge was the warning he received from the Ghosts of Christmas Past, Present, and Future came before he died. Seeing in a dream, how his behavior affected Tiny Tim's family and the fate that awaited him, Ebenezer Scrooge has a change of heart and repents. There's no such luck for the Rich Man in our Gospel. He's already in Hades and his eternal judgment has already been rendered. Even in Hades his attitude of entitlement hasn't changed. He still asks Abraham to send Lazarus to fetch him some water. Failing that, he asks Abraham to send Lazarus back to warn his family about the fate to come. He still thinks of Lazarus and by extension any and everyone lower in class as his servant. He still doesn't think of Lazarus as his neighbor, a person he is to love as he loves himself... He had no regard for Lazarus in life and still doesn't in death.

So, what are we to make of this parable Jesus tells to the lovers of money? At the beginning hearers and readers may assume they are expected to identify

with the rich man or with Lazarus, but this parable is far more subtle than that. We stand in the place of the brothers who are still walking this earth. We're the ones the rich man wants to warn. We're the ones who have Moses, the prophets, and the scriptures to warn us about our fate to come. It's a parable about repentance, yours and mine... The question this parable demands of us is this: will you hear the word of God and repent? To repent means to have a change of heart.

Earlier, I implied the rich man didn't help out poor Lazarus, but there may be evidence to the contrary. For the friends of Lazarus to cast him at the gate of this particular rich man every day must mean this was known to be a place where beggars would receive a hand out. Also, there's no indication from this story that even if the rich man had taken Lazarus in and dressed his wounds and fed him at his own table that these good works would have fulfilled all his duty toward Lazarus or the rest of the poor for that matter. True charity is more than a grand gesture offered to the Lazarus's around the world. It's more than flinging money or quilts at a problem and then washing our hands thinking we've fulfilled our obligation to the poor. True charity is a change of heart towards those we consider our inferiors. It involves fundamental neighborliness. It means we don't look on those we serve at the FISH pantry or the Soup Kitchen and then come home and in our prayers thank God we're not like them. To the contrary, fundamental neighborliness means we actually love them as we love ourselves. That my

brothers and sisters is not a once in a while grand gesture, but a daily commitment.

It means seeing the face of Jesus in those we serve and loving them.

Finally, this parable is not a prescription of how to earn your way into the arms of Father Abraham. It is about how we live our lives today, tomorrow and every day under the reign of God. In God's Kingdom all of God's Children love and care for one another. All God's Children seek to help one another, we welcome one another, and we serve one another. Hmmm... Seeking, welcoming, and serving... Does that sound familiar? I hope so...

May we be a people who continue to make grand gestures of our time, talents, and our treasures, but never at the expense of our daily commitment to seeking, welcoming, and serving... loving all people. Since we have heard the voice of one who has been raised from the dead, may we choose this day to follow the living Jesus Christ and by his example learn to live our lives in ways that are pleasing to God, not to earn our way to the bosom of Father Abraham, but out of the great love and gratitude we have for the one who did bridge the chasm between the place of eternal torment and our own personal seat at the heavenly banquet.

Amen.