Text: Luke 16:19-31

**Introduction**

I like my ruts. They are comfortable. I know we live in a society that supposedly prides itself on offering novelties galore. And “being creative” is constantly prized, at least in speech. But for as much as we say we want that, I think we are lying to ourselves. Because there is nothing that causes more societal angst than when we are forced to change. Look at the upset that the recent bout of inflation caused. It threw us out of our ruts. We had to say “whoa, can I really afford this morning breakfast sandwich and coffee.” But I like my morning sandwich. Who is taking away my breakfast sandwich.

And it is not that ruts are bad. The wrath that can descend upon the pastor that changes the liturgy is legendary. Even the pope has issues. Over sixty years after trying to change their mass, that communion is still trying to manage dissatisfaction. People get disturbed out of their ruts and start to ask questions about other things. One of the gifts of creation Genesis notes is that God place two great lights in the sky. One to govern the day and the other to govern the night. And they were signs for seasons and days and years. And there was evening and morning. Ruts can just be appropriate rhythms of life. The problem with ruts is not the repetition. It’s how safely enfolded in them, we quit paying attention.

Gamers, or my kids might say, we become NPCs – non-player characters. We haunt the same places. We say the same things. We repeat the same loops. And we don’t really recognize life around us.

**Text**

Jesus tells us this story of the Rich man and Lazarus. I don’t think you can really call it a parable. First of all one of the characters has a name. The characters in the parables are never that specific. Our Gospel lesson feels more like a story – potentially a real story that played out every day in front of everyone going through their ruts – that Jesus lifts the veil a little bit on. “There was a rich man who dressed in purple and fine linen and feasted every day. And at his gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores.”

Oh Lazarus, is that his name? Sure, we know who you are talking about. Some of us have to drive by him or step over him as we go about our day. A bunch of us work for that rich man. That guy, Lazarus you say, is always there as we show up to get out daily assignments.

And Jesus continues to add information. “who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man’s table.”

Sure, I could see that. Makes sense. Did any of us ever give him anything? Roll down the window.

“even the dogs came and licked his sores.”

Probably not. He’s just there. We avert our eyes. We step over. I mean, he’s a mess. Who knows what happens if you divert your attention.

“The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham’s side.”

Wait, he’s dead? Didn’t we just see him this morning? When did he die? I didn’t notice.

And now that Jesus has everyone’s attention, he continues the story about where such shuffling through life ends up. “The rich man died and also was buried, and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side.” Notice that this is the first time the Rich man has done two things. He lifted up his eyes. He looked around at everything and saw for the first time. Now this next observation might be wrong, but I don’t think it is a mistake that looking up and being in torment are connected. Even if good news should cause us to look around and give thanks. As Luther’s explanation to “give us this day our daily bread” says, “God certain gives daily bread to everyone without our prayers, even to evil people, but we pray in this petition that God would lead us to realize this and to receive our daily bread with thanksgiving.” Daily bread, evening and morning, Seasons and days and years. Good things. Should lead us to recognition and thanksgiving. But they usually don’t. It is usually suffering or even minor discomfort. It is being disturbed from our routines and patterns. That causes us to look up. And looking up, the Rich man sees Lazarus for the first time.

And every day that he stepped over Lazarus, who only wanted the scraps from his table. Every day he stepped over Lazarus without really seeing him. Every day he muttered about the stray dogs the man brought to his gates. Every day that this man was before him and he could have done even the least thing and given him a cup of cold water and he walked on by comes up. “Father Abraham, have mercy, send Lazarus to dip his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish.”

**Two Reasons**

But now it is too late. And Father Abraham gives the man two reasons. The first one is a moral reason. You had everything in life and all that life to recognize Lazarus at your gate, and you did not. Lazarus had absolutely nothing. We might be tempted to read Karma here, but the bible really doesn’t like the concept of Karma. And besides, the cultures of Karma just don’t care about poor Lazarus. That is what reincarnation is for. This is a statement of the great change. The first will be last and the last first. It’s a statement of the topsy-turvy reality of the Kingdom of God. Jesus came for sinners. Jesus came to call the lost. Jesus came to comfort those who mourn. To give the earth to the meek. To give the kingdom to poor in spirit. Things we see as blessings, often are not. “Woe to those who are at ease in Zion.” That very ease can lead us to not look up. To miss the time of our visitation. To not understand that the ways of God are not our ways. It is the way of the cross that is the narrow way. Father Abraham’s first reason is that we need to know that the Kingdom works on different rules.

And his second is a statement of the seriousness of this one and only life. “A great chasm has been fixed.” And there is an interesting distinction called out. “None may cross from there to us.” And it wasn’t the rich man’s plea to send Lazarus to get him, he merely wanted some of the goodness brought to him. But the contrast is that Abraham seems to imagine that some might go. “Those who would pass from here to you may not be able.” What happens in this life is meaningful. Today is the day of mercy. If you want to bring cold water to the suffering, do it today. Tomorrow there is a chasm. If you notice a Lazarus at your gate, bring him the scraps today. Tomorrow there is a chasm. If you want someone with you with Father Abraham, tell them today. Tomorrow there is a chasm. Today is the day of grace. Tomorrow is the judgement.

**Pay Attention for Meaning**

The rich man doesn’t argue with Father Abraham about his fate. He seems to accept it. But now looking up and noticing he is full of mercy. And he begs Abraham to send Lazarus to his five brothers “Warn them, lest they also come to this torment.”

And Abraham invokes a paradox. The necessary thing has already been given. “They have Moses and the prophets, let them hear them.” And the thing that he is asking for would not work. “If they don’t hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.”

Because the truth is that Jesus has risen. God sent someone who rose from the dead. And the resurrection is not some metaphor. I find it part of Jesus’ sense of humor that here in Luke he calls the poor man Lazarus. Because in John he will raise Lazarus – a completely different person – from the dead. I find it hard to believe that wouldn’t have caused the apostle’s a chuckle. The very thing that we all think would solve everything, God gives. We all think if God would only appear once more with signs and wonders everything would be fine. But the truth is the world is full of signs and wonders. This water is not simple water only. It is water and the word of God. This water gives eternal salvation to all who believe. But it is not just the sacraments – although those are the things that the promises of God attach to. God continues to work miracles. And we never look up and see them. And if we happen to see them for a minute. We quickly forget them. “You’d be amazed at how quickly this never happened.”

Because what is necessary is not the signs and wonders. Christ is risen. What is necessary is the Word. What is God doing? How does the Kingdom come to us? What do these signs and wonders mean? And we have been given Moses and the prophets.

If we don’t pay attention to them, the resurrection remains meaningless. One more thing we can force into the background. But if we pay attention – if Moses and the Prophets capture our souls – our daily routines become not just comfortable ruts, but seasons and days and years full of meaning. If we pay attention, we daily drown the old man and daily the new man rises to live in righteousness. If we pay attention, we may know Christ and the power of his resurrection, and may share in his sufferings…that by any means possible we may attain to the resurrection of the dead.