The Gospel at Our Gate

Sixteenth Sunday After Pentecost, Proper 20C || September 28, 2025 || 9:30am St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, Hanover, MA || Jeremiah 32:1-3a, 6-15; Psalm 91:1-6, 14-16; 1Timothy 6:6-19; Luke 16:19-31 || The Reverend Amy Whitcomb Slemmer, Esq.

Welcome – and thank you for being with us on one of those weekends that will be among the St. Andrew's community's storied milestones! Yesterday, on a crisp and gorgeous day, we welcomed hundreds of people (292 to be exact) who shopped, said a few prayers, helped us clean out our cupboards and raise some money, and today, we are gathered for worship in advance of our kick off for a brand new year for our high school youth group – Shore to Shore!

We are blessed with a gospel that whollops us with its obviousness, and we can thank Luke for his vivid and cinematic description. I love that his words could be a script for a screen play and we'd get it immediately!

This morning we hear of a rich man, clothed in purple and fine linen, who feasts every day. These are great and notable context clues indicating extreme wealth – purple dyes were expensive, and frequent feasting - only for the elite!

In contrast to the purple-wearing well fed man, we are offered the poor beggar Lazarus who lies at the rich man's gate. This Lazarus (a name derived from the Eleazar and means "God has helped" in Hebrew) is not to be confused with Jesus' good friend Lazarus who was raised from the dead is probably afflicted with leprosy, which means he was both a social outcast and so ill that providing for himself was impossible. We are told that day in and day out, the rich man passes the ailing and disfigured Lazarus without offering him a greeting, drink or scrap of food. In fact, Lazarus' only comfort is from the dogs that lick him.

When Lazarus and the rich man die, their fates are no longer intertwined, but very very different. Lazarus receives a hero's welcome and a place of prominence at Abraham's side, while the rich man is plunged into excruciating torture in Hades.

While the imagery here is stark, a tiny bit gross or stomach churning, this is one of those parables that is so clear!

We children of God have choices. We can choose to be kind, generous, curious and engaged in alleviating the suffering of the world **or** we can keep to ourselves, squander our gifts, waste the chances to share and know God in each other.

While the distance and contrast between the rich man and Lazarus is described as a great chasm, the fact of the story is that these two distinct souls were a whisper apart every day that the rich man would come and go. Lazarus and his suffering were not on a distant continent, community or back alley. He was in plain sight, on the rich man's literal doorstep.

This morning we are invited to see that our gospel values, the gospel needs, the lessons we are taught can be learned and lived out every day with friends, neighbors and strangers.

This week I participated in a meeting hosted by a relatively new ministry called Braver Angels, named based on a phrase that Abraham Lincoln used at the close of his inaugural address as our country was on the brink of Civil War. President Lincoln said at the precipice of a disastrously and deeply divided nation:

> *"We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained, it must not break our bonds of affection. The mystic chords of memory, stretching from every battlefield, and patriot grave, to every living heart and hearth-stone, all over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union, when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature."*

A gifted orator, who wrote and delivered soaring prose, Abraham Lincoln.

The practitioners of the Braver Angels commit to seeing the suffering at the gate and not turning away. They call on each of us to see our neighbors and their wants, needs, disgruntlement or disillusionment with the eyes of Jesus – with kindness, love and curiosity.

President Lincoln characterized all of us as not enemies, but friends. In Jesus' parlance we are not enemies, but siblings in Him.

If you are flummoxed about how to go about the work of relying on our better angels, or how to identify and alleviate the suffering at our gates, I was pretty enthusiastic about the first step this ministry prescribes. Participants are expected to take a pledge that they will not speak ill of, or malign or characterize people whose views or lived experiences differ from their own. The beginning point of this shared work is that Words Matter!

Braver Angels offers a pledge for on-line speech, and in person interactions. These pledges and the growing group of adherents will change the world, and offer a wonderful opportunity to transform the tenor of our current political discourse and stinging social interactions. (I

think there were a couple of thorny Yard Sale interactions yesterday – out of literally hundreds – that might have benefitted from Braver Angels.)

The Rich Man in Hades cries out that if he'd only known the consequences of his choices – his decision not to see or to walk by and ignore Lazarus, he would have repented while alive. We have this morning's scripture passages to remind us what God needs of us – what this challenged world – needs from us.

Yesterday we offered generous love, hospitality and community – neighborly connections for our bargain hunting shoppers. We also offered them a safe place to pray and share their fears, heartbreaks and anxieties.

Our yard sale also offered us the chance to live into the wisdom that Paul expounded upon in his letter to Timothy. Paul reminded Timothy and us that the love of money, or the hoarding of "stuff" blinds, distorts and destroys us. What we cling to in greed, fear or ignorance will not endure. But what we give away will echo into eternity!

This morning we are reminded to open our eyes and be generous. To be God's people in this world who notice and attend to the marginalized, the disillusioned or our neighbors in pain. We are told to move out of our routines and comfort zones so that we **can't** walk blindly past people struggling. In this parable, so clearly and cinematically described, we are invited to open our eyes and hearts, to let compassion interrupt our comfort.

And here is the extraordinarily good news. When we tend the gate, when we cross the chasm no matter how big or small, when we navigate across the threshold toward our neighbor, we'll find Christ waiting there for us.

As we navigate the week ahead, as we welcome teens and parents and visitors checking St. Andrew's out, as we are joined by new leaders who are going to learn about the Godly Play program, as we go about our lives this week, may we have the courage to look for and see Lazarus, to cross any chasm, to rely on our Braver Angels. And once there, may we offer a kind word, our curiosity and our loving presence. In doing so, we are being God's presence in the world that hungers and thirsts for kindness. Amen+