

SERMON FOR EVENING PRAYERⁱ

THE FIRST SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

Lessons: ⁱⁱ

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the seventeenth Verse of the twenty-first Chapter of the Book of Job.ⁱⁱⁱ

“... How oft is the candle of the wicked put out! and how oft cometh their destruction upon them! God distributeth sorrows in his anger. They are as stubble before the wind, and as chaff that the storm carrieth away. God layeth up his iniquity for his children: he rewardeth him, and he shall know it. His eyes shall see his destruction, and he shall drink of the wrath of the Almighty. For what pleasure hath he in his house after him, when the number of his months is cut off in the midst? Shall any teach God knowledge? seeing he judgeth those that are high. One dieth in his full strength, being wholly at ease and quiet. His breasts are full of milk, and his bones are moistened with marrow. And another dieth in the bitterness of his soul, and never eateth with pleasure. They shall lie down alike in the dust, and the worms shall cover them. Behold, I know your thoughts, and the devices which ye wrongfully imagine against me. For ye say, Where is the house of the prince? and where are the dwelling places of the wicked? Have ye not asked them that go by the way? and do ye not know their tokens, That the wicked is reserved to the day of destruction? they shall be brought forth to the day of wrath. Who shall declare his way to his face? and who shall repay him what he hath done? Yet shall he be brought to the grave, and shall remain in the tomb. The clods of the valley shall be sweet unto him, and every man shall draw after him, as there are innumerable before him.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the nineteenth Verse of the sixteenth Chapter of the Gospel According to St. Luke.^{iv}

“There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day: And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores, And desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man’s table:

moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried; And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame. But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented. And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence. Then he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house: For I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment. Abraham saith [SETH] unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent. And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead."

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: "“If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced if some one should rise from the dead.””^v In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

Homily:

Today's Second Lesson is the familiar parable of the rich man and the beggar. Sometimes, especially in Roman Catholic sources, this parable is referred to as "Dives [DEE-vase] and Lazarus". The poor man, Lazarus, is expressly named^{vi} in the account in the texts of the New Testament which form the basis for the King James Version, the

Revised Standard Version, and our other familiar translations. His name means “he whom God helps”, from which we are probably intended to infer that he was a pious and worthy person.

Oddly, the other character in the story is not so named.^{vii} Rather, throughout the customary versions of this account he is simply referred to as “the rich man”. In fact, the ascription “Dives” [DEE-vase] that is sometimes used to identify him is simply the Latin for “a rich man”.

Now remember that in Judaism, a male child is *named* during the ceremony known as the *bris*, that is, during his circumcision on the eighth day after his birth, and a Jewish girl is *named* during an equivalent naming ceremony, just as a Christian child is named at his or her baptism. And a Jewish boy’s circumcision or a Jewish girl’s naming is the occasion on which he or she joins the people of the Mosaic Covenant, just as a Christian’s baptism is the occasion on which he or she joins the people of the New and Everlasting Covenant. So in both these cases, the act by which a person becomes a member of the covenant people is also the act by which he or she acquires his or her name – and that is, by definition, a religious name.

The association of these two events is not mere coincidence. *Name* and *know* share some common connotations; thus a thing that we *know* is a thing for which we have a distinguishing *name*. The same is true with respect to our relationship with God: it is by receiving a religiously-sanctioned name that we become *known to God*.^{viii} In a real sense, the rite of religious initiation is our formal introduction to Him.

It is important that we bear this in mind as we begin to examine today’s parable. It means that, between the two principal actors in this drama, we have a protagonist who is named, that is, is suggested to be one who is *known* to God, and an antagonist who does not receive the dignity of his own name but, instead, is merely described by the happenstance of his economic circumstances: “a rich man”. Thus, by implication, this antagonist is *not* known to God. In this fashion, right at the beginning of the story, we are given a foretaste of how it is going to turn out.

So that is the first point I wish to call to your attention: the poor man is named, and his name is Lazarus, but the rich man is not named, and is simply “the rich guy”. The next point I wish to bring to your notice is the picture we are invited to infer as to the way that rich guy operates.

There are four facts that we are told that are significant in assessing this rich man’s behavior. One of those facts is that he took very good care of himself, for we are told that he “was clothed in purple [an exceedingly expensive textile, far costlier than silk is in our own day] and fine linen” and that he “feasted sumptuously every day”.^{ix} So the rich guy was very, very well clothed and fed and, by implication, was very comfortably housed as well. So of Abraham Maslow’s hierarchy of basic needs, he had not just taken care of food and shelter but had moved on to real luxury.

Another of those facts is that Lazarus lay at the rich man’s gate. Since the rich guy had to pass in and out of that gate every day, he could not possibly have been unaware of Lazarus or of his condition.

The next of those facts is that Lazarus was hungry and ill. We know he was hungry because he was dreaming of the scraps that were left over after the rich guy’s feasts^x. We know he was ill because he was suffering from visible and probably painful skin lesions.^{xi}

And the final fact is that because Lazarus’s hunger and pain continued until his death, it is pretty clear that the rich man did nothing to alleviate them.

Throughout human history, it has been customary for the wealthy to take the leftovers from their meals and to distribute them, either at the doors of their houses or by special messengers, to the needy. The account of Jesus’s encounter with the Syrophoenician woman suggests that this custom was observed in Our Lord’s day^{xii} and the Old Testament Scriptures instruct Jews, such as the ones to whom Our Lord was speaking, to make provision for feeding the needy.^{xiii} And from the parable of the Good Samaritan we know how Our Lord felt about caring for those who were in poor health.^{xiv}

All together, we are left with a clear picture of the rich man as a person who signally failed to live up to Jesus's standards for how we are to treat those who are less fortunate than we are.^{xv} Now examine that fact in connection with Our Lord's reminder that our love for God will be judged by how we have shown our love for the needy.^{xvi} "Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me"^{xvii} and "Truly, I say to you, as you did it not to one of the least of these, you did it not to me."^{xviii}

Thus we will not be surprised at the *denouement* [**day-NEW-mawh**] of the story when we learn, near the end of this parable, that when the rich man died, he did not go to heaven, where he would have been in company with the poor man who died lying in the street at his gate. Instead, he went to hell, which he found a very uncomfortable alternative.

Conclusion:

Finally, the self-absorbed rich man's reaction to his predictable fate leads us to the lesson that is the important teaching here for those who seek appropriately to live out their Christian profession. The Jewish Scriptures, which are our Old Testament, give all the guidance anyone could possibly need as to how to live an upright life that is appropriate for one who is a member of God's chosen people.

That is why the lawyer, to whom Jesus told the parable of the Good Samaritan, was able to take the entirety of the Old Testament moral prescriptions and to deduce from them what we Anglicans call "the Summary of the Law": "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself."^{xix}

So all the guidance the rich man could have needed was laid out for him in the Jewish Scriptures, that is, in the Law and the prophets. But the teachings of that Law and of those prophets were precisely what he failed to follow.^{xx} And, as the rich man learned all too late, if one does not act upon what the Scriptures teach, then even someone's return from the dead will not be enough to save that heedless person from hell.

The Rev'd Canon John A. Hollister^{xxi}
June 26, 2011.

ⁱ “Any set of Psalms and Lessons appointed for the evening of any day may be read at the morning service, and any set of morning Psalms and Lessons may be read in the evening.” Concerning the Service of the Church, *THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER* viii (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

ⁱⁱ *Psalms and Lessons for the Christian Year* (1943), *THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER* xxvii (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

ⁱⁱⁱ *Job* 21:17-33 (KJV).

^{iv} *St. Luke* 16:19-end (KJV).

^v *St. Luke* 16:31 (RSV).

^{vi} *St. Luke* 16:20.

^{vii} Apparently, at some time after the Second World War, a manuscript did surface which named this man as “Neues”, I. H. Marshall, *Luke*, in D. GUTHRIE AND J. A. MOTYER, *THE NEW BIBLE COMMENTARY REVISED*, 3RD ED. 913 (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1970). That discovery, however, has not been taken into account as a basis for amending any of the commonly-used translations.

^{viii} For bringing this point to my attention, I am indebted to Fr. Warren E. Shaw, Priest in Charge of St. David’s Anglican Catholic Church, Charlottesville, Virginia.

^{ix} *St. Luke* 16:19 (RSV).

^x *St. Luke* 16:21.

^{xi} *Ibid.*

^{xii} Cf. *St. Matthew* 15:27 and *St. Mark* 7:28.

^{xiii} E.g., *Leviticus* 19:9.

^{xiv} *St. Luke* 10:34.

^{xv} See, e.g., *St. Luke* 12:33 & 18:22.

^{xvi} *St. Matthew* 25:34-45.

^{xvii} *St. Matthew* 25:40 (RSV).

^{xviii} *St. Matthew* 25:45 (RSV).

^{xix} *St. Luke* 27; see also *The Order for the Administration of the Lord’s Supper or Holy Communion*, *THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER* 69 (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

^{xx} *St. Luke* 16:31.

^{xxi} Assisting Priest, Christ Anglican Catholic Church, Metairie LA. Honorary Canon, the Diocese of the Resurrection, and Honorary Canon and Canon to the Ordinary, The Diocese of New Orleans, The Anglican Catholic Church.