Sermon copyright © 2010 by Pastor Erik Kindem, Peace Lutheran Church, Seattle, WA. All rights reserved.

Proper 21C
Peace, Seattle
September 26, 2010 epk
Luke 16:19-31

THE RICH MAN AND LAZARUS[1]
PART ONE

ERIK: This morning, we're exploring the parable of The Rich Man and Lazarus in a dialog sermon with three parts. As you hear the story for the first time, listen as though you were the rich man. What do you learn about yourself? What are your assumptions? What are your entitlements?

LAURA: The Holy Gospel according to St. Luke, the 16th chapter…
[The text is read, after which the congregation is seated]

ERIK: What was life like for the Rich Man before he died? What do we know about him from what he does? What are his assumptions about his life?

LAURA: He knows one thing: he has a right to his wealth and status. He is blessed—by God! And he can also assume that Lazarus is not. He has learned from the Bible that the good life comes from doing the right thing:

ERIK: *"If you will only obey the Lord your God. . . God will set you high above all the nations of the earth. Blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, if you obey the Lord your God."* Deuteronomy 28.

LAURA: The rich man had the good life, therefore, he must have done the right things. Of that he was confident.

ERIK: The rich man did have a blessed life. Look at his clothes—clothes fit for a king. Fine purple on the outside; Egyptian linen underneath. You can bet he didn't shop at Good Will.

LAURA: And not only did he have enough food, he had *sumptuous* food—every day! He chose to live his life completely insulated from riff-raff like Lazarus.

ERIK: In spite of what Scripture teaches about care for the poor, Lazarus is invisible to the rich man. There is no indication the rich man ever has any contact with this poor man at his gate.
Even after he's in Hades, the rich man doesn't speak to Lazarus.
He knows his name, but he doesn't know Lazarus.

LAURA: He still believes he's entitled to order Lazarus around, and Abraham, too! It's the entitlement of those who have.

[1] This sermon dialog is based substantially on one written and presented by The Rev. Paul and Boots Winterstein who served as devotional leaders at a LENS continuing education conference held at Holden Village in September 2001. It has been edited and shortened for congregational use. Used by permission of Paul and Boots Winterstein.

Sermon copyright © 2010 by Pastor Erik Kindem, Peace Lutheran Church, Seattle, WA. All rights reserved.

--- PAUSE ---

ERIK How many of those same assumptions are ours?

LAURA What do we claim as our birthright, our entitlement?

ERIK Living the American Dream? Having access to cheap food and inexpensive clothes? Living comfortably in retirement?

LAURA: Are we entitled to our life style regardless of how it effects others and creation itself?

ERIK Who do we pass by on the way to the grocery store, as we pull out of the Costco parking lot, or on the way to our favorite restaurant on the nights we don't feel like cooking?

LAURA The homeless family living in their car, the mentally fragile, the undocumented immigrant who labors in the fields and washes our dishes in the back kitchens of the restaurants—do we see them?

--- PAUSE ---

ERIK: And what of our assumptions about God?
What are we entitled to in this relationship with the God we boldly call "ours"?

--- PAUSE ---

LAURA: Perhaps, as Christians, our entitlements are those of Jesus, our brother. Entitlement to serve.

ERIK: To notice Lazarus in our midst.

LAURA: To learn his name. To hear his story.

ERIK: "Whoever would be first among you," Jesus said, "must be servant of all."

LAURA: That's a promise…and a challenge.

ERIK: "Love one another as I have loved you."

LAURA: Maybe that's our entitlement—our birthright in baptism.

ERIK: Abundant life—not rationed out but flung out boldly—freely.

LAURA: Yes! Walking with Lazarus out from the shadows and into the light.

ERIK: ***Please join us in singing verses 1 & 2 of hymn #715,***
"Christ, Be Our Light"

Sermon copyright © 2010 by Pastor Erik Kindem, Peace Lutheran Church, Seattle, WA. All rights reserved.

THE RICH MAN AND LAZARUS
PART 2

ERIK: *"At the rich man's gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man's table; even the dogs would come and lick his sores."*

LAURA: That's all we know. His name is Lazarus. He's poor. He lies at the gate of the rich man. He has a disease that leaves him covered with sores that the dogs lick. And, he's hungry.

ERIK: What else lies there? What are the unspoken hungers, the deep longings? In a society with no safety net, wouldn't he rather have gotten up each day and gone to work? Wouldn't he have longed for healing so he could do just that?

LAURA: Rather than lying in the dust, wouldn't he have longed for some sense of dignity—to have satisfied his own hunger from his own labor? Was this the lot God had chosen for him, or was it the cruel hand of circumstance? The questions linger, unanswered.

ERIK: And how he must have longed for community, for a place to call home, for the laughter of companions, for warm embraces.

LAURA: What hungers lie there in the person of Lazarus?

ERIK: What longings, unshared, unspoken, unanswered?

--- PAUSE ---

LAURA: The years pass on, yet Lazarus is still here among us. His story is played out in the lives of women and men we can see every day; and in the stories of victims of violence, natural disaster, and circumstance around the world.

ERIK: In White Center and West Seattle. . .

LAURA: In New Orleans and Haiti. . .

ERIK: In Sudan. . .Afghanistan. . . Iraq.

LAURA: What longings are theirs? How many wait for loved ones who will never come home or for a healed body they may never have?

ERIK: How many hunger still to do something productive—anything at all—to respond to these tragedies, but are so far away?

Sermon copyright © 2010 by Pastor Erik Kindem, Peace Lutheran Church, Seattle, WA. All rights reserved.

LAURA: How many hunger for revenge—even knowing that revenge may not be practical or appropriate or effective?

ERIK: How many long for peace, for safety, for clarity, for knowing the way of Jesus?

LAURA: …And having the courage to follow!

ERIK: What hungers drive the systems and those who tend them or look the other way?

LAURA: Lazarus is not the only one incapacitated by the sin which twists and mars our lives.

ERIK: The place where hope may be found is not at the gate of a better rich man, but rather in the mercy of God who creates new possibilities for the helpless.

LAURA: Freedom for all kinds of prisoners. . .

ERIK: New vision for those who are blinded by a world of hate. . .

LAURA: Justice to those who are overwhelmed and helpless. . .

ERIK: And food for those who hunger.

ERIK: ***Please join us in singing verses 3 & 4 of "Christ, Be Our Light"***

THE RICH MAN AND LAZARUS
PART THREE

ERIK: *The rich man said, "Then, Father, I beg you to send Lazarus to my father's house—for I have five brothers—that he may warn them, so that they will not also come into this place of torment."*

LAURA: *Abraham replied, "They have Moses and the prophets; they should listen to them."*

ERIK: *The rich man said, "No, Father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent."*

LAURA: *Abraham said to him, "If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced, even if someone rises from the dead."*

ERIK: Oh, the irony of it all. . . *"even if someone were to rise from the dead."*

LAURA: Perhaps Father Abraham was right—if God's clear call through Moses and the prophets isn't sign enough, will a resurrection be any more effective?

Sermon copyright © 2010 by Pastor Erik Kindem, Peace Lutheran Church, Seattle, WA. All rights reserved.

ERIK: The question hangs before us, begging for an answer; a warning to all who look for security somewhere other than in God.

LAURA: What if, on this side of resurrection, it's not too late to show the world what love and light look like? After all, there is another sign—the one Jesus himself spoke of when John's disciples came to him. They asked, "Are you the one that is to come?" Remember what Jesus answered?

ERIK: "Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk...

LAURA: the lepers are cleansed,

ERIK: the deaf hear...

LAURA: the dead are raised...

BOTH: and the poor have good news brought to them!"

LAURA: That's good news for Lazarus. A divine reversal! Poetic justice?

ERIK: Maybe, for us, a kind of divine leveler!

LAURA: Ah—the low lifted up. . . the upper—lowered (hand motions). 'Till everyone is at the same table, in the same circle!

ERIK: Not poetic justice, but God's own sweet justice!
LAURA: I could live with that!

ERIK: And maybe this side of resurrection we are the five brothers...

LAURA: and sisters...

ERIK: and sons...

LAURA: and daughters...

ERIK: …with a story to tell. With life abundant to share.

LAURA: Not just one, but many.

ERIK: Answering God's call.

LAURA: Eager to shine.

BOTH: Thanks be to God. Amen!

ERIK: Please stand and join us in singing the final verse of "Christ, Be Our Light"