

Psalm 91:1-6

You who live in the shelter of the Most High, who abide in the shadow of the Almighty, will say to the Lord, "My refuge and my fortress; my God, in whom I trust." For he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler and from the deadly pestilence; he will cover you with his pinions, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness is a shield and buckler. You will not fear the terror of the night, or the arrow that flies by day, or the pestilence that stalks in darkness, or the destruction that wastes at noonday.

Luke 16:19-31

"There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. And at his 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. The poor man died and was carried away by the angels to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried. In Hades, where he was being tormented, he looked up and saw Abraham far away with Lazarus by his side. He called out, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am in agony in these flames.' But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that during your lifetime you received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in agony. Besides all this, between you and us a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who might want to pass from here to you cannot do so, and no one can cross from there to us.' He said, 'Then, father, I beg you to send him 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.' Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the prophets; they should listen to them.' He said, 'No, father Abraham; but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' He 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.'"

I. Halloween in Peoria

II. retelling of story

III. lazarus today

IV. waiting for a ghost

V. we have Moses and the prophets... and Jesus

VI. bless the kyros ministry, bless Sheltering wings, bless and give out the blessing bags

Sermon

Happy Fall everyone. Even though the weather last week still felt very summer like, it appears that this week will give us more of that crisp mornings and early evenings. I love the fall season. Maybe it is the falling of the leaves and the wearing of sweatshirts. Maybe it is because my birthday is in the fall. Maybe it is because of Halloween. It is not my favorite holiday, but I do like it.

When my wife and I bought our first house in Peoria, IL, it was a corner house in the middle of the neighborhood. So when Halloween came around, our house was a well visited door. In fact, after the first year we learned that we would need more candy than we thought. And I loved seeing all the kids and their costumes, some superheroes and some villains, some scary masks, some witches, and some ghosts. Sarah and I also enjoyed the opportunity to meet our neighbors while carrying and then walking with our young children. But sometimes we might overhear or even have a direct conversation about “those kids”. “Those kids” were the kids that trick o’treated in our neighborhood but didn’t live in our neighborhood. Often these were racially minority children and many were distinguishable by cheeper costumes and pillowcases to hold their loot. “Why don’t they trick o’ treat in their own neighborhood?” “They are too old to be trick o’ treating.” “They must have been dropped off by a bus on one end of the neighborhood and picked back up on the other.” But you know, we never had a problem with any of the kids on Halloween, and I loved seeing every costume and the smile behind them all.

Lazarus sat at the gate way of the rich man for most of his life. One thing to notice in this parable is that Lazarus has a name, but the rich man could be anyone. Lazarus sat at the gate, not wishing for a seat at the table, maybe just some leftovers from the rich man’s table. But the rich man ignored him most of the time, and when he did see him it only upset his appetite, and at times he would set the dogs out to try to encourage him to go away. “Why does he have to sit at my door? He should stay where no one has to look at him.” But then the scene shifts to the afterlife, and now the roles are reversed. Lazarus has a place of comfort with father Abraham and the rich man is in torment. “Send Lazarus to dip his finger in water and quench the flames for a moment.” But Abraham reminds him that he had all the good things he could want in life and never felt compelled to help Lazarus at that time. And then the rich man asks something that, to my ears, sounds very sincere and earnest. “Send Lazarus then to warn my family.” But Abrahams words are haunting, “They have Moses and the prophets and do not listen to them. Even if someone rises from the dead, they will not listen.”

And Lazarus is still alive today. We see her at the crossroads of highways and shopping centers, holding her card board sign and wearing her dirty clothing. And Lazarus is sitting in a jail cell, isolated and afraid and feeling unloved. Lazarus is the service men who are stationed for months on end, in dangerous situations, away from their families and friends and everything that they know. Lazarus is the woman at Sheltering Wings, he is the shut-in who can only watch as the world goes by his window. Lazarus is still alive today, standing at our gate and wonder if we are willing to share just a bit of the leftovers to help alleviate the pain.

And we wonder, why should I help someone who hasn't earned it? Why can't they get a job? I would be just waisting my time and money on someone who is probably on drugs and/or violent. This guy probably makes more money standing at the corner than I do working all day long. But I promise you, no one wants to beg at the corner, no one wakes up and says, Today I start my new job with dirty clothes and a cardboard sign.

And so we feel helpless, like there is nothing we can do. We feel put out to help, inconvenienced and even repulsed by the idea of loving the Lazarus in our midst. And we still have Moses, the law, and we have heard the prophets, the word of God for today. And we even have Jesus, the teller of the parable, who we believe was raised from the dead so that we might find life abundant. Are we still waiting for a ghost to tell us what we are called to do?

Friends, we are not helpless. Last week, during our day of caring event, many of you donated and many helped put together what we are calling blessing bags. The bags have an assortment of different items that could come in handy for anyone living on the streets. From a bit of food, to basic hygiene products, to a few articles of clothing. The blessing bags are meant for us to put in our car, and next time we come to the intersection with Lazarus, we are ready to help. Last Sunday we made placemats - hand made placemats - and you might wonder how these placemats might make a difference. Well these placemats are going to be used in the Kyros Program, which is a program that shares the love of Christ to inmates within our incarceration system. And we made cards as well, cards that will be sent to our service men and women during the Christmas season, cards of encouragement and love to the Lazarus who is far from home and struggling in difficult places to find peace.

Lazarus is still with us today, not so much at our gates, but still in plain sight. Let us share what we have so that we might share God's love today.