

Proper 21C  
Luke 16:19-31  
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### Being A Good Neighbor

There's something different about today's gospel. In all of Jesus' parables, this is the only time a character is actually named. The diseased and destitute man, who's left to beg outside the rich man's gate, is called Lazarus.

It's far more normal for the rich and famous to be named. They're so easy to recognize. Back in first century Palestine, you'd know them by their elegant clothing made in that expensive, royal color of purple. And today, we can depend on social media to keep us current on who's who and who's doing what — it would take more effort NOT to know about the rich and powerful. We recognize them. We may even watch for them. And we certainly know their names.

But the poor and the marginalized — that's a different story. The impoverished and the homeless tend to be the invisibles ones. When we do notice them, we may even find ourselves looking away, too uncomfortable to look closely at those who obviously live with so much less. It's hard to look the poor in the eye, much less start a conversation, or get connected enough to actually exchange names.

But this parable pushes us to see a new reality, God's reality, which is a reversal from the norms of our world. For what happens in this world, the suffering and inequity of this life, are only temporary problems. God sees all God's beloved children. God sees the world's invisible ones. And God cares. Like Lazarus, they are not only seen, but named, and their future is secure — a future the world cannot see, when God's justice is restored.

We, as Christians, are called to open our eyes and to open our hearts. We're called to follow in Jesus' footsteps, recognizing that loving God means we also should love our neighbors.

How can we be good neighbors?

Last week, our youth group attended Church of the Common Ground at Woodruff Park in Atlanta. Some of us had been there before and knew that we would celebrate Eucharist under the trees, then offer bag lunches that we had prepared that morning to help feed the hungry.

But this Sunday was different. This time, we started the service with the burial liturgy, joining the community in remembering JohnBoy, John Mike Shirley, a homeless man, who had battled cancer.

JohnBoy had died two week's earlier, not as a nameless, invisible person, not alone, but as someone who was known and loved. He was someone's son, someone's friend, a kind-hearted member of the Church of the Common Ground, a beloved child of God. And as strange as it may seem, knowing that the Church of the Common Ground holds its services, rain or shine, in a park — for it is truly a church without walls — this community does know each other.

There's a practice during Sunday worship, when the community comes together, holding hands. One by one, everyone takes a turn within the circle, to proclaim who they are, naming themselves to the community. Then all are asked to take the time, while still holding hands, to see each other, to look at everyone within the circle, recalling that each one is a beloved child of

God. This community takes the time, each and every week, to consciously try to see the God-spark, Christ's light, in one another.

There's something for us to learn here, something for us to carry out into world. The poor are named. The community is encouraged to see each other. Real people, with names, identities, families, and a history. Lazarus. JohnBoy.

How can we be good neighbors? We need to see that today's parable is about more than money. I imagine Jesus would still have told this story, even if the rich man had given Lazarus a few coins for food and some second-hand clothes. For neighborliness is not superficial. It's not sporadic. There's something more fundamental about neighborliness.

Neighborliness is an inner attitude of the heart, a willingness to carry Christ's light into the world, and the courage to see another, to care for another, when the world tells us it would be wise to simply turn away, put on our blinders, and look past another's anguish.

This past Wednesday evening, we had our first parish dinner to share the mission journeys taken during by both our church and Fr. Keith, during his sabbatical time.

Trips like these do help us learn to be good neighbors. While in Honduras, our youth team spent time with the children and adults of LAMB Institute, as well as local workers. We heard their stories. We began to understand both what we have in common and what is different. We learned from each other, finding common ground and sharing our hearts of compassion. We began that process of becoming good neighbors by praying together for one another, by caring for one another, and by using our God-given gifts to love and support one another — but most importantly, to recognize Christ within one another.

And being a good neighbor is infectious. It can change all those we come in contact with. Our youth, after going to Honduras, see things just a bit differently. For many, their hearts are open to not only examining issues in the world more closely, but also within our own community, recognizing that there's so much more to another person than what we see from outward appearances.

When we begin to see the beauty of God's diverse creation, understanding that all truly are God's beloved children, we can begin to see how how much we can learn from one another! I invite you all, particularly if you were unable to come to last Wednesday night's dinner, to take the time to read through our youth team's reflections on their trip. Here what our team saw, understood, and absorbed. There are copies on the oval table in the Parish Hall.

How can we be good neighbors? How can we love our neighbors as ourselves?

We can, through prayer, study, and healthy conversations, learn about the issues our neighbors face today and discover what it means to walk in another's shoes, understanding their stories.

We can come together at this table, and be nourished and strengthened for our work in a difficult world, asking our Lord and Savior to help us to grow to be better neighbors.

For we do need God's help, to begin to establish a fundamental neighborliness within our very being. We need the Spirit to help us recognize that God-spark in all around us, with particular intentionality for those who may be different than us, because of race, creed, color, sexual orientation or economics. We need our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, to help open our hearts to the possibilities of a united human family.

It's been a difficult week, with violence in Charlotte, Tulsa, and New York. Let us pray together for our human family by turning in your Book of Common Prayer, to page 815.

O God, you made us in your own image and redeemed us through Jesus your Son: Look with compassion on the whole human family; take away the arrogance and hatred which infect our hearts; break down the walls that separate us; unite us in bonds of love; and work through our struggle and confusion to accomplish your purposes on earth; that, in your good time, all nations and races may serve you in harmony around your heavenly throne; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.