

Jeremiah 32:1-3a, 6-15

Psalm 91:1-6, 14-16

1 Timothy 6:6-19

Luke 16:19-31

Do you remember the summer of 2011? It's a vivid memory in my own mind. In August of that year, I put all my worldly goods in storage and moved into a dormitory room at Virginia Theological Seminary to begin my three year career as a seminarian and prepare myself for a life forever altered...the life of a priest. Stealing the media headlines that summer and fall was the phenomenal development of an apparently leaderless grassroots movement called the Occupy Movement. Remember that? It was a political activist group complaining about the concentration of wealth and influence in this country in the top 1% of the population...if you define 'top' as people with the most money. That left the other 99% at the mercy of those who control the wealth and the political influence in this country. The disparity between the 99% and the 1% just didn't seem fair to those participating in the Occupy Movement. While I could sympathize with their complaints, I also simply shook my head. Didn't they realize, I thought...these 99% in Occupy Wall Street and Occupy DC...didn't they realize that to the rest of the world, THEY are the 1%? It occurred to me then, that all of this is just a matter of perspective. And while I agree that it is not equitable or just or fair for 1% of the population to control the vast majority of the wealth and the political power, it's still a matter of perspective...a matter of how we see things. To the rest of the world, the United States is the 1%...ALL of the United States...even the poor people here. And I had to wonder if any of them realized that Jesus had something to say about the 1% and the 99%.

We heard Jesus speak on this phenomenon in the gospel this morning...this disparity between rich and poor. Remember, Luke's gospel is about reversals...all kinds of reversals. Do you remember how this gospel begins? In the very first chapter, when Mary visits Elizabeth, we hear Mary saying the Magnificat...a testament to reversals: "He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts; He has brought down the powerful from their thrones; and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty." These words are such a comfort and source of hope to anyone who struggles with not having enough.

In today's gospel lesson, Jesus told a tale about a rich man (one of the 1%) who is lost and a desperately poor one (one of the 99%) who is suffering, but is not lost. For the last several weeks, we have been listening to Jesus speak in parables about what is lost...the sheep, the coin, and the dishonest manager...and what is found...the one sheep out of 100, the 1 coin out

of 10, the 1 manager who had a change of heart. We missed out on hearing about the prodigal son who squandered his inheritance and was lost in every way possible.

Jesus' audience for these parables is a mixture of Pharisees and tax collectors and sinners. Jesus' point was that God rejoices in the recovery of someone who has been lost...rich or poor. What the Pharisees don't realize is that many of *them* are the ones who are lost in the sight of God. They ridicule Jesus for criticizing them for being lovers of money, but it's not the money itself that is bad; it's the love of money...the lust after money...the obsession with money...the priority of money as all-important... which is at the heart many sinful acts and evil. Jesus tells them that what is prized by human beings...wealth, prestige, fame, power, influence...is an abomination in the sight of God. That's how God sees it, but the Pharisees don't want to hear that or see it that way.

And then Jesus tells the tale of the rich man enjoying life behind his gate and poor Lazarus lingering outside the gate desperately in need of medical care, food, clothing, shelter, and the reassurance that someone cares about him. When both men die, they each end up in different worlds. Lazarus is lifted up to the bosom of Abraham and the rich man finds himself in a realm of torment. During his lifetime, the rich man didn't see the needs of Lazarus at his gate. He didn't seem to think that Lazarus' needs were any of his concern. He didn't see that he had a responsibility to share some of his bounty with Lazarus who had nothing. He didn't see that the decisions he made in this life would influence how he would spend all of eternity. He didn't get that connection. He didn't see that just because he was wealthy did not mean he'd gotten a 'pass' from God. What he did see was that he was living a pampered and easy life which he may have presumed meant that God loved him because he was blessed with so much! That's an easy trap to fall into. Indeed, all provision is made by God. We are all beholden to God for the resources he has provided, but with great abundance also comes great responsibility. The rich man was aware of Lazarus because he called him by name in the afterlife. So he had seen him. He did know who he was. However, he still saw Lazarus as beneath him because he wanted Abraham to send Lazarus to do his bidding. Despite their dramatic reversals of fortune, the rich man still saw Lazarus as an underling. The rich man did not see that God saw things differently.

In St. Paul's letter to Timothy that we heard this morning as well, St. Paul reminds us to be content with what we have because those who want to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many senseless and harmful desires. In their eagerness to be rich, they have wandered away from the faith. He reminds us that the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Fight the good fight of the faith, he says, and take hold of eternal life to which you were called. And St. Paul says that those who in the present age are rich, command them not to be haughty or to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but rather they should set their

hopes on God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. They are to do good works, to be generous, and to be ready to share. In that way they will store up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future. This is true life. When St. Pauls says these words, he is speaking directly to us as well! He wants us to see what is really important...what is truly lasting and eternal. Jesus does not ever say that God condemns wealth. Jesus says that God condemns the love of wealth...the love of money...the focus on money to the exclusion of all else including the actions and attitudes that lead to true life in this life and the next.

It's the easiest thing in the world to get caught up in chasing the almighty dollar as if our financial security would secure our lives and safety. Somewhere in our thinking, we know that's not completely true. Financial resources may make our lives a bit easier, but if we have all we need, we are expected to share. That's a lesson we all learned in kindergarten. Those rules haven't changed. With great wealth comes great responsibility and great expectations.

Perhaps God has put resources in our lives not only to provide for us, but to see what we would do with them. Will we see what God wants us to see? Is our faith strong enough to influence the choices we make and direct the actions we take? Remember, the main obstacle to faith is not lack of proof; it is an excess of other interests and investments—of time, money, energy, dreams, etc. Where are we making our investments? Where do our interests lie? Are we investing in service to others? Do we see Lazarus at the gate and reach out to care for him?

With God's help, we will.

Thanks be to God.

AMEN.