

### Luke 16:19-31

I had a dream in the early hours of the morning on Saturday that really bothered me... I was at an outdoor church function, no specific church, with many people gathered around talking. I saw a woman with wavy blonde, shoulder length hair, that was curled under, wearing a white blouse with a narrow, rounded peter pan collar and a beige A-line skirt. For some reason I took an instant dislike to her and ignored her.

After the function I was inside the church. The office was large, with double doors that opened onto a huge open room that was an entryway to the building. The pastor's desk was on one side of the room and faced the administrative assistant's desk which was on the other side with a wide expanse of white flooring in between the two desks. The doors were wide open, and I could see the custodian polishing the floor in the adjoining room. There was a woman handing me printouts of information. I read one and told the woman to put it on Brenda's desk (imagine that: this church my mind made up and the administrative assistant's name is Brenda!) and the other printout was a notification that there was a potential scammer on the prowl. Her name was given and a description that matched the woman who I saw outside the church. I said to the woman who handed me the notice, "Doesn't that describe the woman who was outside just a little while ago?" And she agreed it did.

A few minutes later that woman, the one from outside the church, appeared in the doorway of the church office. I rudely asked her, "How did you get into the building?" She was surprised by my question answering, "The doors were open and I came in." She stood there watching while I ignored her and started working on a project that was on a side table near the doors. She never asked for anything; she just stood there watching. As I was finishing up the project another woman who had been working in another part of the church came into the office to the table where I was working and said, "I'm going to take the woman, she said her name but I have no idea what it was, I'm going to take her home. We'll probably stop to eat somewhere." I said to this woman, "Be careful, she's on a scammer list. She might take you for everything." To which this woman replied, "I am so tired of people thinking everyone is out to get something from people. She was working with the caterers, and we needed something. She gladly ran and got it with no questions asked. Why have you been so rude to her?" That's when I woke up.

That dream, even though I know it was a dream, bothered me for hours. Why had I judged that woman so harshly? Why did I choose to ignore her? Why did I choose to be mean to her? Why did I assume she was a beggar?

Why was Lazarus a beggar? Unlike the woman of my dream who appeared to be healthy and was well dressed, you can tell from Luke's description, Lazarus was definitely poor. It is possible he was born into poverty, or he could have once been employed and became ill, no longer able to work and therefore having no income. We aren't given that information. We are only told he was poor, ignored, and carried away by angels to be with Jesus (that's what is meant by being in the bosom of Abraham). The man who ignored him was extremely wealthy. The rich man also died and was buried.

He went to Hades, a place that is, evidenced by the man's thirst, very dry, where he was being tormented. He could see across the great chasm that separated the place of torment to Lazarus being cared for in the bosom of Abraham. Even though the rich man

wasn't named in the parable, we are told the poor man was named Lazarus. The man knew Lazarus by name even though he ignored him and did not tend to his care. He must have thought that his wealth kept him above reaching out to the poor man. Even in death he considered Lazarus as someone who should wait on him, calling out to Abraham to have Lazarus dip his finger in water and cool the man's tongue. How callous, to think that Lazarus whom he wouldn't even help on earth should wait on him in death. Yet even if he would have wanted to reach out to the rich man, Lazarus would not have been able to cross the great chasm that separated the two. What is that chasm? Rev. Jay Mitchell told us at the pastor's Bible study he believes a great chasm is created when a person hardens their heart against God. If we go by this belief, we realize that the wealthy man hardened his heart against God. Lazarus, even though he had a horrible earthly existence, did not blame God for his circumstances, but continued to have love for God.

Rev. King Duncan in a sermon on this text writes "There was a sad but touching movie that was nominated for an Emmy many years ago titled, "Verna: USO Girl." Terry Hershey tells about it in the book, Go Away, Come Closer. In the film Sissy Spacek portrays a clumsy, tone-deaf song-and-dance girl hired by a USO troupe because no one else is available. Verna neither sings on key nor taps with the beat, but she is utterly convinced that her destiny is stardom. She is sure that when she dies thousands will attend her funeral. Their memories of her will make her immortal. Verna does not become a star, but she does make a hit with a certain GI who falls in love with her. Though Verna returns his love, she decides she cannot disrupt her career to marry him. And so the show goes on. Verna pushes herself to perform during a battle when everyone else is too scared to move. Nothing will discourage her from fulfilling her destiny. Nothing will cause her to turn back. Not her lack of talent nor even the love of her young GI. Finally, though, Verna is killed by a land-mine. An Army Public Relations Officer hears about her tragic death as the first USO girl to die in action. This Public Relations Officer decides her story might boost morale. So he gets the story out. He arranges for foreign dignitaries to attend Verna's funeral. Bands march behind her casket. Ironically, no one even knows her name. Having rejected love in pursuit of success, she dies without either. But she does have a big funeral (Dallas: Word Books, 1990). In her own way, Verna was as needy as Lazarus. Her needs were psychological and emotional. We might even call them pathological, but they were just as real" (sermons.com accessed 09/27/25). Verna received her reward after her death. It wasn't what Lazarus received, but she was recognized and celebrated.

Although I know none of us has had the life that poor Lazarus lived, most of us at one time or another felt as though we had been ignored. We hoped that another person would have reached out to help us, but there was no one. We felt lonely and abandoned. I believe that is how the woman in my dream must have felt standing there by the door, knowing she was there for a legitimate purpose, yet being greeted rudely and totally ignored. Until the woman who had invited her was able to reach out to her and affirm that she was not abandoned and alone. Even though we feel as though we may be in such a circumstance, we truly are never totally alone. Through the Holy Spirit we always have the presence of Jesus with us. And when we keep the faith, we will receive our reward. All glory be to God.