

Yr. C, Proper 21  
September 25, 2022  
Preached by the Rev. Furman Buchanan  
Christ Episcopal Church  
1558 Words

Lessons: Amos 6:1a, 4-7  
Psalm 146  
1 Timothy 6:6-19  
Luke 16:19-31

As young children, our girls probably spent as much time under the kitchen table as they did sitting around it. How could a child not dream of crawling into such a safe and sheltered world, veiled with a patchwork of blankets and fortified by chairs leaning in like the flying buttresses of a cathedral?

Other times, these architectural accoutrements were not present; only a small ‘cotton top’ child on the floor, with dimpled elbows and dimpled cheeks, quiet crayons and blank paper.

It is easy to overlook a child under the table. When Finley was being overlooked and wanted our attention, she would pipe up and say, “Hey, Hey! I wanna’ tell you something!” In today’s Gospel lesson, Jesus wants to get the attention of wealthy listeners—people like you and me. Using the unsettling parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, Jesus is saying, “Hey Hey! I wanna’ tell you something!”

It is a story we dare not overlook...a story about a poor man beneath a rich man's table, among the dogs, praying for a few crumbs to fall his way. This is where the poor lived back then—in places easy to overlook. This is where the poor still live now—in places easy to overlook.

Hey Hey! I wanna’ tell you something! We don’t have to overlook the children of God who don’t have a place at the table. We don’t have to overlook the children of God who do not have “this day their daily bread.” We can share a better story than that. We can *live* a better story than that.

So, how do we live a better story than that? The answer, I believe, is found in the second part of Jesus’ parable. We learn through the course of the story that the poor man and the rich man died. That is when the tables got turned...maybe I should say, that is when the tables got *overturned*.

You see, the rich man did not get to take one bit of purple fabric or fine linen or sumptuous food and drink with him to the other side of the grave, and neither do we. What we learn from Jesus’ story is that the only thing the rich man took into the afterlife was his stubborn sense of entitlement.

For the first time in the story, the rich man actually sees Lazarus, only he *still* could not see him as a child of God in the embrace of Father Abraham. The rich man saw Lazarus only as a servant who might jump and fetch him some water or hop up and serve his living brothers.

We can learn to see more clearly than that. We can practice “seeking and serving Christ in all persons, by loving our neighbors as ourselves.”<sup>1</sup> This is the beginning of how we share a better story than the rich man in Jesus’ story. This is the beginning of how we can live a better story than that.

In South Africa, the traditional greeting in the Zulu language is “*Sawubona!*” It translates as “I see you.” What a beautiful idea from a language—the idea that before we can speak to one another or listen to one another or serve one another, we first need to *see* one another.

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<sup>1</sup> This is taken from one of the promises in the Baptismal Covenant, *Book of Common Prayer*, p. 305.

So, how can we learn to see others—not for what they can do for us, but for whom God created them to be—living, breathing, Holy Spirit-infused, human miracles—with real hungers and thirsts, real gifts and problems, real joys and sorrows? The only way to see others as God sees them is to practice—practice seeing with the eyes of Christ...in other words, seeing more compassionately and less judgmentally.

When we see with the eyes of Christ, we can see through the entitlements or prejudices or masks that cause us to overlook “the dignity of every human being.”<sup>2</sup> When we see with the eyes of Christ, we can learn to look under the table and discover who is there. When we see with the eyes of Christ, we are moved to come down from our comfortable places and serve those who are easily overlooked.

Many years ago Kim and I needed a baby sitter one afternoon. I don't remember why, only that our regular babysitters were not available. So, an older woman at our church volunteered to keep Katherine and Finley. It was not an ideal situation from my perspective, because she lived in a very nice home with a lot of beautiful, breakable things. We all know that fine china and young children really do not belong together.

But Ms. Pat could *see*...she could see our need; and so she insisted upon watching our girls for us. She had spent a lifetime practicing what it means to look with the eyes of Christ and respond with grace and mercy.

You know, this is not just a story about a Rich Man who could not see beyond his privilege or a story about Ms. Pat who could see beyond her privilege; it's also a story about you and me and some tangible ways that we can practice sharing and living a better story by seeing and serving beyond our privilege.

We can live a better story by looking for ways to respond to the neighbors in our community who suffer from hunger or food insecurity. I don't know what all that might be. I'm delighted that you get to show me how to look and see and serve here.

I love that Meals on Wheels is at the front door step of this property. And I trust that while it may be the first thing our neighbors see about us, it will not be the only thing that our neighbors see from us when it comes to seeking and serving Christ among the poor, hungry, and isolated people where Jesus promised that we would find him.

At a time when the number of hungry children is growing; and the churches who see and respond to their needs are shrinking we get to stand with the prophet, Amos; the apostle Paul; and our savior, Jesus Christ, who spoke in perfect unison about being “rich in good works, generous, and ready to share.”<sup>3</sup>

Our mission at Christ Episcopal Church is to grow-in-love...with God *and* with our neighbors. And we can pick whatever you like to begin sharing and living a better story! I'm eager to see with the compassionate eyes of Christ, and then serve with strength and courage as the living members of his Body in this place.

One of the defining features of growing congregations is that they are generous congregations...they are relevant congregations...they are compassionate congregations. We will do well *when* we do good, generous things in Christ's holy name!

We picked up our girls from Ms. Pat that evening. I looked into my children's eyes for any sign of trouble, hoping there would not be a story from the afternoon involving fine china. As it turns out, there was a story to be told. When we got into the car Finley said, “Hey Hey! I wanna' tell you something. We had a special tea party!”

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<sup>2</sup> This phrase is taken from one of the promises in the Baptismal Covenant, *Book of Common Prayer*, p. 305.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted from today's Epistle lesson, 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 6:18

“Really?” I asked, “What is it that makes a tea party special?”

Katherine chimed in, “Ms. Pat—she got down on her knees and we had the tea party under her table!”

“Wow!” I thought about her elegant dining room table, and also the fact that Ms. Pat walked with the help of a cane.

Finley laughed. “It was fun! We wanna’ do it again!”

Ms. Pat—she began a better story with our children. She did not overlook them. She wanted to see them—and all children—as children of God. She knew how to meet them where they were and serve them. And she served them much more than tea under her dining room table...she served them love.

Years later, when we moved from Columbia to Greenville, Ms. Pat was not limber enough to get down under her table for another tea party, but it did not stop her from once again sharing a better story. She took that fine china that was used that afternoon to sip and spill tea all over her carpet...and she gave that tea set to our children. “Wow!”

Y’all the story of Jesus is just like this! We have been given what we need to share a better story and to live a better story than the rich man in this parable. We have been given the wisdom of Moses and the prophets. We have been given the encouragement of St. Paul. And above all, we have been given the grace and mercy of God—not only through the stories of Jesus, but also through the resurrection of Jesus.

And so, it is our turn to take what we have been given, and to live a better story...with God’s help.

Let’s see our neighbors. Let’s love our neighbors. Let’s make it interesting and fun. Let’s make it a “Wow!” kind of a story for the glory of God.

Amen.