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“A great chasm exists between us and you” (Luke 16:26).

*Jeremiah 17:5-10; Luke 16:19-31*

The parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man has much the same message as the parable of the Last Judgment in Matthew 25. Those with resources are responsible for helping those in need. But Luke’s storytelling gift is evident in the detailed contrasts and thematic tie-ins contained in the tale of poor man Lazarus lying on the doorsteps of the indifferent rich man living in luxury.

While the dogs are licking Lazarus’ sores, the wealthy man is stepping over him in his fine outfits to rush off to another banquet. The contrast of their deaths is equally glaring. Lazarus is whisked away to the bosom of Abraham while the rich man’s corpse is buried in the ground, his soul consigned to the shadowy netherworld for an eternity of agony and regret. Yet, even there, he is no less arrogant, bidding Father Abraham to send Lazarus to serve him.

Abraham’s description of the chasm between them is the most shocking revelation of their separate conditions. The distance the rich man put between himself and the poor in this life is now fixed. His failure to share his surplus with those lying in need before him day after day was digging the very chasm that would greet him in eternity.

The parable is addressed to the Pharisees, whose privileged lives and theological presumptions are revealed in the rich man’s plea to Abraham to send Lazarus back

to warn his five brothers. The five books of Moses had more than enough teachings about caring for the poor to warn them, but with little impact. What of a messenger from the dead? This last sign was in fact what Jesus' opponents had received when Luke's parable was being composed. Jesus was the rejected poor man on the cross who had risen from the dead to open the eyes of the world to God's justice. The world's continued blindness was an even greater tragedy.

Our own lives run the same danger of judgment because of the walls, both visible and invisible, that create chasms between the haves and have-nots, separated by neighborhood and zip code, class and racial distancing, gaps in opportunity, income and education. Cities are designed to prevent us from seeing the virtual apartheid of rich and poor, surplus and need.

Yet many deliberately cross borders to share their time, energy and resources. They welcome the discomfort of knowing social realities and working to alleviate suffering, to build bridges and networks of relationships that open their eyes and minds to the diversity that enriches everyone. They are building the Beloved Community we will live in together in the age to come, where Lazarus will be revealed as the evangelist who saved us by alerting us to the Good News when it could still make a difference.

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