

19th Sunday after Pentecost
"Take Hold of the Life that really is...Life"
Luke 16:19-31 and 1 Timothy 6:6-19
9/29/13

When you need to remember something really important, what kinds of things do you use to help jog your memory?

Do you write yourself a note and stick it somewhere you can see it?
Do you set an alarm on your computer or cell phone?
Do you set your homework or backpack right by the front door?

We do these things, don't we, because forgetting something important can have lasting consequences.

Take the rich man in today's Gospel. He suffered from a memory problem that cost him eternal life with God. This self-important man, dressed in fine clothes and eating gourmet food had forgotten who he was. And worse yet, he had forgotten what God expected of him.

As a descendant of Abraham and Sarah, this man was a member of God's chosen people, but he had forgotten what that meant. He had forgotten that when God called Abraham and Sarah, He called them for a purpose. God told them that they would be blessed so that their offspring would be blessing to all people.

In today's parable, God placed this poor man named Lazarus, begging at the gate, to jog the rich man's memory, to help him remember his identity. But the rich man was so absorbed by his material comforts that he tuned out, God's reminder. For this rich man, the needs of the poor are not even on his radar screen.

In our readings these past several weeks from the Gospel of Luke, there is a common theme, and Jesus really brings this theme home, in chapter 16. Jesus is challenging the lifestyle of those who only live, at a surface level, those who only live life on a material level.

He is challenging the lifestyle of those who are preoccupied with the things of this world
... the things that we buy
...the things we use to entertain us or distract us
...the things we sometimes hope will bring us comfort or make us feel good.

Luke has arranged these teachings of Jesus, in order to confront the idol of possessions. And in today's Gospel reading Jesus brings this home in a very dramatic way in this parable of the rich man, and his neighbor Lazarus.

As Jesus tells this story he reminds us that there will be judgment for those who make the things of this world, their god.

Things become our god, when we give them, first priority, when they receive the first of our time, our energy, and our resources. “Things of this world”, are things which have no eternal purpose.

In this story the rich man realizes too late, that he has made a great mistake. And from Hades, where he is being tormented, he calls for mercy, and he asks Father Abraham to send Lazarus, to his father’s house to warn his five brothers, so that they would not make the same mistake.

But Abraham replies, “They have Moses and the prophets; they should listen to them.”

In other words, they have the Holy Scriptures, they have warnings from Moses, and Isaiah, and Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, and all the other prophets.

And in the Holy Scriptures, they have heard the greatest commandment, the command to “love the Lord your God, with all your heart, mind, and soul, and to love your neighbor as yourself.”

But the rich man doubts that they will listen to Moses and the prophets and still wants Lazarus, to go to them so that they will repent.

Abraham responds, “If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.”

This parable serves as a warning, a warning we need to hear.

But this parable serves as more than just a warning. This story also points us to the hope that we share as Christians.

The Good News that is lifted up in this story, is the good news that God has indeed raised his Son, Jesus, from the dead.

And the heart of Jesus’ message to the world is this: “I have come that you may have Life and have it abundantly.”¹

...not a counterfeit, material, illusion of life...
...not something temporary, that won’t last, but rather eternal life

Jesus described eternal life not as just something off in the future. Eternal life is a gift from God, that we live in now, and a crown of victory that we receive in the life to come.

¹ John 10:10

This reminds me of one of my favorite stories.
 It's the story of four people who were on an airplane.
 There was a pilot, the world's smartest man, a Sunday School teacher, and a Boy Scout.
 As they were flying along the plane started to have engine trouble.
 So the pilot came back with an announcement.

We have two problems on this plane. One is that we are going to crash.
 And two is that we have four people on this plane and only 3 parachutes.

"I'm the pilot, I'm a family man, and I know where the parachutes are,"
 so he grabbed one and jumped out.

The world's smartest man, turned to the other two and said,
 "I'm probably the world's most intelligent man, if I were to die there would be a void of
 knowledge that neither of you could replace, so he grabbed one and jumped out.

So the Sunday School teacher turned to the Boy Scout and said,
 "I have lived a longer life, and I believe that when I die, I will be with God in heaven,
 I want you to take the last one."

But the Boy Scout just looked back at her and said, "Cool it, Teacher,
 the world's smartest man just jumped out of the plane with my backpack."

The truth is there are some very smart people in this world
 who are holding on to a backpack, a counterfeit of life, and it won't do them any good.

Our 2nd reading this morning, couldn't say this more clearly, when it says,
 "take hold of eternal life...to which you were called"²

And towards the end of this passage, Paul says specifically to those who are rich, "be a good
 steward, don't set your hopes on the uncertainty of riches.
 "Rather, set your hopes on God who richly provides us with everything.
 Be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share,
 that's how we "store up for ourselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future."

This is what it means, "to take hold of the life... that really is...life."

The problem is that we are all faced with so many counterfeit choices.
 ...things that are dressed up and attractive
 ...things that are really easy to get caught up in.
 In fact, some of these things are things God has created for good like:
 recreation, our work, and our families.

² 1 Timothy 6:12b

But you add all these things up that we fill our lives with and if they have the effect of taking all of our time and all of our energy and our resources then they quite frankly have become the objects of our worship and God gets the leftovers, God gets the crumbs.

Things that are not eternal are replacing that which is eternal.
and we end up spiritually malnourished and empty trying to find life, in the wrong places.

Today God calls out to us just as he did to the rich man.
God calls us to remember our identity, to remember who we are,
to remember that we have been blessed to be a blessing.

In baptism, we have been raised to a new life, in Christ.
We have been born anew to a living hope.

Each week when we come together in this place, God reminds you who you are.
The love of Jesus has changed you.

Jesus says to you this morning, "I have come, that you may have life and have it abundantly."

God's Word shows us how to give life to each other, to our neighbors, to anyone who is in need.

So each day, may the Holy Spirit remind you of this Good News,
and may each of us "Take hold of the life, that really is...life." Amen.