

September 25, 2022

Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Jeremiah 32:1-3a, 6-15

1 Timothy 6:6-19

Luke 16:19-31

“Love, Money and Missed Opportunities”

1. When I was in high school, I took a class where they taught us how to program in Basic
 - a. It was 1981 and I was working on a Tandy TRS 80 from Radio Shack. Just a few steps above chiseling on a stone tablet
 - b. Programming was intriguing to me.
 - i. With a very specific sense of logic, you guided the computer through a series of questions, options and actions based on the input the computer was given
 - c. Computer language is basically a series of 1s and 0s.
 - i. Think of it as little light switches
 - ii. The light is on, so then this happens
 - iii. The light is off, so then this other thing happens
 - d. In the programming, you helped the computer navigate a roadmap of sorts
 - i. If this happens then perform this action
 - ii. If this condition is met, then do this other thing
 - iii. It is an endless set of Yes / No questions, basically
2. Our three passages for today present us with binary options (Yes, No) when it comes to how to live our life as faithful followers of God
 - a. The story which stands out is the story of Lazarus and the rich man
 - i. It's a parable Jesus is sharing with folks who were wealthy and, in the view of Jesus, not compassionate enough
 - ii. While on earth, Lazarus lived a life which was miserable
 - iii. The expectation at the time was that a person living in poverty would draw near to the home of someone who was wealthy
 - iv. Standing outside the gates of that home, the rich person would give the person in need some support, food in particular
 - v. The person living in poverty would see the rich person as a patron, and would owe them some degree of allegiance.
 - vi. The story begins with the rich man having banquets daily, and yet not once did he give even a little food to Lazarus
 - vii. (and neither did the dinner guests we assume were there, I should point out)
 - viii. Upon their deaths, there is a reversal of fortunes
 1. Lazarus is comforted in heaven, and the rich man is in agony in Hades

2. Suddenly the formerly rich man is asking for even just a drop of water, and he is denied it
 3. Fine, then please warn my family!
 - a. This is the first time we see compassion by the formerly rich man
 - b. He is concerned about his other brothers, still alive
 4. But Abraham says: they know what's right to do. A person risen from the dead isn't going to sway them.
- b. The Timothy passage tries to get at the option of compassion in our actions
 - i. As Rev. Paula Pettis-Garrett, our excellent preacher last week, quoted from today's passage, "the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil."
 - ii. She reminded us that money is not what is evil, but rather being enamored of it, being ruled by it, is what leads us away from God.
 - iii. The Apostle Paul is encouraging Timothy to be generous and compassionate, not distracted by riches, but being rich in good works.
 - c. Finally we have Jeremiah's shocking prophetic choice
 - i. The walled city of Jerusalem was under siege by the Babylonian army
 - ii. Things were very hard for the city's inhabitants
 - iii. Jeremiah had spent time telling the people to turn from their sinful ways, but they had not listened
 - iv. In fact, Jeremiah was being held by the King of Judah who was angry with Jeremiah's preaching – which indicated that Jerusalem would fall
 - v. That's the backdrop for this passage, which represents a shift in the storyline
 - vi. God tells Jeremiah to buy some land, in the middle of this war. Land that had belonged to his family in a town outside the walled city of Jerusalem
 - vii. Who buys land during a military siege?!
 - viii. The purchase symbolized that normality would come, eventually. That people would buy and sell property and live their lives, in a land where God was once more the God of the people, where people chose to follow God.
3. Jesus is calling us to a faithfulness that says yes to compassion.
 - a. In a way, the parable about Lazarus and the rich man is about love, money and missed opportunities.
 - i. There was as broken system exposed for all to see, as the painful boils on Lazarus' body.
 - ii. What should have been a heartwarming story of the rich man showing compassion instead becomes a cautionary tale
 - iii. And again, but the rich man wasn't the only one who saw poor Lazarus by the gate.

1. The entire community saw him and averted their eyes, and closed their hearts.
 2. Lazarus was missing the love of a community who acknowledged him and sought to support him.
- b. When we opt for compassion, we move closer to God.
- i. Time and again, the stories Jesus tells or the examples he gives with his actions, have to do with showing compassion, truly being with someone in need
 - ii. Jesus wasn't wealthy, but he shared his love lavishly
 - iii. The people he loved had found themselves a bit like Lazarus, feeling invisible and neglected.
 - iv. It would make sense, then, that when Jesus cared for them, they felt a deep sense of loyalty to him, and they followed him.
- c. Being compassionate is sometimes not convenient
- i. I add this story here cautiously and only to make a point of the daily choices we all have to walk the talk and not just talk the talk.
 - ii. As I was getting ready to begin writing this sermon this week, a young man came to the office wanting to talk with me.
 - iii. I knew him. He has come to the church for Hot Meals, he has asked us for help.
 - iv. We have fed him. We have helped him with some money.
 - v. It hasn't always been easy. He's dealing with some mental health issues and past trauma, so his short fuse is easily lit.
 - vi. There were a few times when things got contentious at Hot Meals because of his temper.
 - vii. But when he and I talk in my office, he's always calm and reflective.
 - viii. He has told me he's working on his anger issues. He says his mouth gets him in trouble.
 - ix. But when he came a few days ago, he just wanted to talk. He told me he was tired of everything. He was done.
 - x. He has been homeless for some time. He gets robbed frequently by other people living in poverty and even homeless folks.
 - xi. I got concerned that he might mean to harm himself, but he said he was done with Columbus and wanted to return home, to New Albany, IN.
 - xii. He has his family there. I didn't know that.
 - xiii. But he has no way to get there.
 - xiv. New Albany is across the river from Louisville, a little over an hour away.
 - xv. There is no bus from Columbus to New Albany.
 - xvi. He wasn't asking for a ride. He was just saying he was done.
 - xvii. I looked at my watch. I had planned the afternoon for working on the sermon and trying to get out from under a mountain of emails.

- xviii. And I thought: how am I going to say no to this young man who trusts me this much, just so that I spend time writing about how we should help people in need?
 - xix. Would you like me to drive you home? I asked. He said that would be great, thank you.
 - xx. So, I drove him to New Albany.
 - xxi. He gave me directions as we got close. He knows the area well.
 - xxii. We stopped at an apartment building near downtown. He retrieved his backpack and another bag from the back of my car.
 - xxiii. Again he said thank you and he walked across the street.
 - xxiv. He was just happy to be home.
4. The message of Jesus isn't about our wealth, but about the richness of our compassion. It isn't about who goes to heaven and who doesn't, but about the opportunities we have here and now to offer help to one another. Jesus is asking us to see one another, truly, and not be distracted or sidetracked by possessions, schedules, or excuses. As we offer each other compassion, we will feel closer to God and to the community where God has called us.

Sources: <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/ordinary-26-3/commentary-on-luke-1619-31-8>

Sunday's Adult Fellowship and Education class will be "Housing 101, Part 2" by Tracy Heaton de Martinez after coffee hour in the Laws Room. Though we won't have a sermon discussion, here are some reflection questions as you hear the sermon.

1. Think of a story when you showed compassion in a way that went against the grain of community / family / society.
2. When you think about the parable of Lazarus and the rich man (Luke 16:19-31), do you think it is more about "heaven and hell" or about living on earth? Why?