

**“If your riches increase set not your heart on them.”** 29 September 2019

Reading: Luke 16:19-31; 1 Timothy 6:6-19

Faithful God

Open the meaning of the Bible to us in fresh and exciting ways.

Amen.

If you don't think you need a new car then you haven't, like me, driven a Tesla 3. On Friday we were given a ride in Tesla's newest and coolest car. Not only is it totally quiet and totally non-polluting, it does actually drive itself. It is pretty unnerving to not be holding the steering wheel or touching the pedals. We even managed to find a piece of Auckland motorway that wasn't bumper to bumper and found it literally has the acceleration of a fighter jet. I could feel myself going from 0 to cool in 3.4 secs. What it is to have wealthy relatives! Wealth is after all relative, the more wealth you have the more relatives you discover you have!

A rich man, no doubt a Tesla 3 owner, went to see his Rabbi. “I have come to you today rabbi for a blessing?” The rabbi took him to the window. “Look through the window and tell me what you see?” The rich man explained that he could see people walking about on the street. “You are right” said the wise rabbi. Then he took the rich man to his mirror. “Look into the mirror and tell me what you see.” “I see myself” said the rich man. “You are right again.” said the Rabbi, “The mirror is the same glass as a window only it has silver behind it. When we have silver, we see only ourselves.” he concluded.

Today's Gospel was a well-known moral story at the time of Jesus. Jesus would have known this story well as would have the first hearers of Luke's Gospel. As always, Jesus puts a unique spin on it. Luke the gospel writer does too. This story has much to teach us.

A rich man who dresses in the finest clothes and eats the very best has at his gate a poor hungry man. To make the poor man's misery worse he has dogs licking his sores. Dogs like pigs are ritually dirty animals. Lazarus the poor man has neither food nor ritual cleanliness. Worst of all he has no dignity. Lazarus dies and he is welcomed to Abraham's bosom. The rich man dies and goes to Hades. As in life so in death there is a great chasm between them.

But even before we get into the Jesus stuff, we can be alerted to a reversal that is taking place. The phrase 'the rich man' would have been noticed by Luke's first audience. Rich people have names. They have long names that go with their wealth, status and power. It's the poor who have no names. They are the nameless ones. Luke reverses this. He doesn't honour the rich man with a name rather he gives the nameless one, the powerless one the name Lazarus which means 'God is my helper'.

Luke is using this story as a fulfilment of the beatitude, "Woe to you who are rich, you already have your consolation."

The great chasm that exists in life between these two men continues even after death. But even in death the rich man is splendidly arrogant. He calls out treating both Abraham and Lazarus as if they are his servants. "Father Abraham get Lazarus to come to me," and then to add insult to injury he uses the word that has been so lacking in his earthly life, "get Lazarus to have pity on me."

Then comes the Jesus bit, "I have five brothers," says the rich man still as bossy as ever, "go and tell them what has happened to me that they might be saved."

Jesus concludes they already have the prophets and the teachings of Moses so they would not be convinced even if someone rose from the dead." Immediately we recognise this as reference to Jesus own resurrection.

Jesus has lots to say about money and wealth and the effect it can have on the human heart. If I could take the liberty of summing up all of Jesus teaching on

money and wealth in one sentence it would be this. Love people use things. Rather than what we are taught by our society which is the reverse, love things and use people.

Our Epistle reading includes what is probably the most misquoted piece of all Scripture. 'The love of money is the root of all evil.' Almost always people quote it as money is the root of all evil. Money of course is neutral. It is the love of money which is the evil. Money can be used for good or ill.

'If riches and wealth increase set not your heart on them.' says Psalm 62:10 and yet that is exactly what we do.

What Jesus and this shocking story from Luke is asking of us today is for a change of attitude. To see beyond our wealth and our consumerism to the people who are left behind. All the good things of our age are to be enjoyed but we must never allow them to blind us from those who are lacking.

In a few moments we too will come as modern day Lazaruses, beggars looking for food. With our hands outstretched we come to the table of the Lord. This Jesus offers us not crumbs from under his table but a great banquet of generosity. We have been set a place of honour, seated with loving kindness before an entire table loaded with the Fruits of the Spirit.

Joy Cowley is a New Zealand poet and children's author. She reflected on this gospel reading: *We will feast on the bread of friendship, and drink from the cup of self-esteem. Oh God let us not forget this moment on days when our own table is rich. May we always remember to set extra places and chairs of loving kindness for the stranger outside our gate.*

Let us love people and use things.