**Message from Revd Jane for the Fifteenth Sunday after Trinity based on Luke 16 19-end**

We are constantly bombarded with images of the poor, refugees, the starving, those without water and those suffering from too much, those living on our streets in doorways in the city centre and visiting our food banks.

The list of the poor we know about is massive and in the global crisis rising.

We can give all we have and while it will make a difference to a few, it will not change people’s hearts, stop global warming or wars and it will not stop global competition and poverty.

This parable is more than about giving to the poor. It is about our use and protection of power as well as wealth; about relying on ourselves instead of God. It’s a call to wake up to life’s realities.

A rich man dressed in purple and fine linen feasted sumptuously every day. He was a powerful person within society and he flaunted it. His clothes were expensive, dyed with purple, the most expensive of dyes.

Purple and fine linen**,** waswhat priests wore, and Jesus was speaking to the Pharisees that loved money. Their robes cost ten times the amount an average man earned in a day. They weren’t paid for by the hard labour of the priests but by common people. The Pharisees had the power to change the lot of the poor by bringing about political and institutional change but didn’t; those charged with the spiritual and physical care of their flock were totally immune to their suffering.

The picture of the rich man would make poor people listening angry. In a country where common people were fortunate if they ate food once a week and where they toiled for six days of the week, the rich man was a picture of lazy, self-indulgence. In contrast, the poor man, Lazarus, who lay at his gate, was covered with sores, and longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man’s table; Dogs came to lick his sores.

I am reminded of beggars in town who are no longer allowed to ask for money, and of large gated homes.

There were probably hundreds of beggars in Palestine but the rich man couldn’t fail to see Lazarus. He was ill, covered with sores possibly as a result of leprosy, or poverty.

He may have brought his suffering upon himself as a result of his lifestyle choices. He may have been infectious. The rich man may have been trying to avoid bringing infection into his home and spreading it further.

He may not have known how to alleviate the man’s suffering. Often we do nothing because we don’t know what to do and getting involved might change our lives forever. We all needed boundaries or we sink.

The man would have been in physical and mental pain. He longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man’s table.

At that time in Palestine there were no knives, forks or napkins. Food was eaten with the hands and in very wealthy houses the hands were cleansed by wiping them on hunks of bread which were thrown away. Lazarus longed to eat the soiled rubbish of the rich man.

I am glad that today’s waste from supermarkets is being used to feed the hungry in cafes and soup kitchens. Though we still have those who raid the bins at the back for out of date produce that is wrapped, I am relieved that in this country we haven’t got the situation of those in many third world countries who live and forage on rubbish dumps to survive.

The dogs licking the poor man’s sores cared and tried to bring comfort.

Dogs were looked down on. The word was an insult reserved for Gentiles. Whereas the rich man showed no humanity or compassion, the dogs did.

Lazarus is the only person ever named in a parable of Jesus. It is a latinised form of Eleazar which means God is my help. The poor are not faceless people with no stories. They are real people with names, identities, and a history. They are not statistics; they are human beings. They are not a one-size-fits-all economic category that we can describe in broad strokes but specific individuals

Although no human being helped Lazarus, God was about to. The poor man died and was carried away by the angels to be with Abraham. Abraham’s bosom suggests he was held, love and comforted.

After death, the poor man received from Father Abraham all he hadn’t received from the rich man who had the responsibility of being a father to him when he was alive.

The rich man also died and was buried. In Hades, where he was being tormented, he looked up and saw Abraham far away with Lazarus by his side.

Death is a great equalizer. We brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out. Sadly, just as there was a great divide between the rich and poor man in life, there continued to be in death. Whereas the poor man was comforted and in a place of safety, the rich man was tormented

When the rich man was buried, all his wealth and power went to someone else. He no longer had the opportunity to make a difference on earth. He was completely powerless.

Today we have opportunity to help others. We may not have tomorrow.

We will be held accountable for what we have and haven’t done. After we have died there is no way we can give restitution or repent of our sin. We may be sorry, but we are beyond being able to do anything about it.

Thankfully whether we are poor or rich we may receive forgiveness through the generous love of our Lord Jesus Christ who became poor for our sakes and took our sins upon himself. The undeserved love we receive from him should compel us to reach out to others and get rid of the gulf between us.

Whereas the rich man had the power to help when he was alive, Lazarus always had to rely upon God.

The rich man asked for Lazarus to come and ease his suffering. He wanted to have a relationship with him now he was in agony. Lazarus was unable to do so because there was still a great chasm between them.

The rich man in his torment was still a child of Abraham. There was great compassion in the way Father Abraham addressed him. He had grown up in Judaism, had heard the voices of the prophets and readings from the law but hadn’t paid them attention. Father Abraham had not been able to stop the rich man getting into a mess.

The rich man from his place of torment tried to organise Lazarus and get him working. Old habits die hard! He said, ‘Then, father, I beg you to send Lazarus to my father’s house for I have five brothers that he may warn them, so that they will not also come into this place of torment.’ Abraham replied, ‘They have Moses and the prophets; they should listen to them.’

The five siblings who were still alive had time to see the poor people at their gates, before the chasm became permanent.

The rich man was not deliberately cruel. He didn’t order for Lazarus to be removed from his gate. He made no objection to him receiving the bread that was flung away. He did not kick him in passing. His sin was that he deliberately ignored him. He never sat and talked with him, found out who he was or why he ended up there. He never included him in his thinking. He thought it was perfectly normal that Lazarus should wallow in pain while he enjoyed luxurious living.

Like those five siblings of the rich man, we have been warned about the gulf between the rich and poor? Will we as a country which has just passed a mini budget which favours the one per cent richest people in our land reverse the policies which make poor people poorer? Will we as individuals heed God’s warning, before it is too late?

**Questions**

1. How much do we rely on ourselves to get through life?
2. The pharisees were immune to the suffering of the poor. How can we support the suffering world without getting overwhelmed?
3. Are the poor right to get angry?
4. We came into this word with nothing and can take nothing with us. How does that make you feel?
5. We have opportunities to help. How do we decide what to do?
6. Will we as a country reverse the policies which make poor people poorer?