

(a translation by Prof. Amy-Jill Levine)

And some person was wealthy, and he dressed in purple and linen, feasting daily, splendidly. And some poor person, named Lazarus, was lying by his gates, being covered with sores.

And he as wishing to be fed from the things falling from the tables of the wealthy, but instead the dogs, approaching, were licking his sores.

And it happened that when died the poor man and he was brought by the angels into the bosom of Abraham, and also died the wealthy, and he was buried.

And in Hades, raising his eyes, being in torment, he sees Abraham from a distance and Lazarus in his bosom. And he himself calling out said, “Father Abraham, have mercy on me and send Lazarus so that he might dip the tip of his finger into water and cool my tongue, because I am suffering in flame.”

And said Abraham, “Child, do you remember that you received your good in your life, and Lazarus likewise the bad. And now here he is being comforted, but you are in pain. And in all these things between us and you a great chasm stands, so that the ones wishing to cross over from here to you are not able, nor from there to us can one cross over.”

And he said, “I ask you, therefore, Father, so that you might send him to the house of my father. For I have five brothers, so that he might witness to them, in order that not will they come to this place of torment.”

And says Abraham, “They have Moses and the prophets; let them listen to them.”

And he said, “Not, Father Abraham, but if someone from the dead would come to them, they would repent.”

And he said to them, “If to Moses and to the prophets not do they listen, neither if someone from the dead would rise would they be persuaded.”

What’s in a name? There’s a question for you! Our names do more than just identify us, they are really part of who we are. Just think how you feel when someone forgets your name? How do you feel when you are anonymous, nameless? It all depends on the circumstances, doesn’t it?

On the one hand, when I visit my Mom (and she’s done this for years), she goes through all of her boy’s names, Ed, Rob, Tom, before she settles on the right one for what she’s talking about - and it’s worse with the grandkids! She knows who she means but doesn’t always get started with the right name. And that’s OK.

On the other hand, I can remember back to what was a rite of passage involving names. When I first played Jr. High football, you had to get a piece of athletic tape, write your name on it, and put it on the front of your helmet. That way a coach could identify you and call your name when it came time for

you to step up in a drill, instead of him calling you 'hey you' - which could of course apply to anyone standing in line- and lead to confusion and delays in the practice. And no one wants to be called 'hey you' ... Do you?

Names are important, significant in many ways.

In this parable, another of Jesus' world-turned-upside-down stories, this one found only in Luke, we are presented an odd but revealing scene, of a beggar with an honorable name, a no-named rich man, and Father Abraham presiding over the eternal fate of generations. A quick look at the three characters gets us started.

Lazarus is a poor beggar but has a name with a pedigree. In Greek, the name *Lazaros* has the same root consonants as the name *Eliezer* who, as is recorded in the book of Genesis, was a servant of Abraham. Some rabbinic tales feature Eliezer walking in disguise from village to village and reporting back to Abraham on how his children are observing scriptural guidelines regarding the treatment of widows, orphans and the poor.

The name Lazarus means "God helps." So, both the name and the plot line of the story would make sense to Jesus' audience, setting up a striking contrast over against the unnamed rich man.

Abraham is the first of the rich men in this story. You can think of him, perhaps, as a Bedouin sheik, with caravans of camels, supplies and a long train of attendants who welcome guests and strangers equally at his evening campsites. As one who famously welcomed angels unawares, Abraham was the definition of welcome and hospitality. (It was said of Abraham that no poor man would lie unattended at his door, and such is the case in Jesus' story.)

The second rich man, unnamed, needless to say, did not fit the same mold as Abraham. As far as we know, he did not actively persecute, punish or penalize poor Lazarus.

He simply seems not to have lifted a finger to help; numb and blind to the needs at his doorstep. But he should have known better.

This is not a story like Charles Dickens' Christmas Carol, with Ebenezer Scrooge getting another chance to do his life over again. This parable is unrelentingly consistent in spelling out the consequences of passive, isolating selfishness.

This is also a parable about a person who refused to be changed. It's a sad story that ends with no will and no way to get from here to there or from there to here. The great chasm between those who rested in the bosom of Abraham and those who dwelled in Hades was already there while the two men were alive, remaining present for an all too obvious reason.

Why was there such a great chasm between Lazarus and the rich man while they were alive? A quick answer could be that the rich man was hard-hearted and selfish. He was just too mean. That's one take. Yet in fact, Jesus portrays him as a person capable of empathy, a man with sincere compassion for his family. He pleads with Abraham on behalf of his five brothers— "don't let them come into this place of torment, too!" But Abraham replies, "They have Moses and the prophets, they should listen to them."

So a better answer of why the chasm existed is that this unnamed rich man simply didn't listen, or if he did- then he sat on his hands and did nothing. And with this, we come to the heart of this parable.

What does it mean to listen to Moses and the prophets? After all, Jesus wasn't referring to himself as judge of all eternity- but was pointing back long before he was on the scene, to those who shared the message of God's mercy. "Pay attention to what they said- and did."- is what Jesus is saying with this parable.

In the book of Deuteronomy, the Lord tells the people: "You shall open wide your hand to your brothers and sisters, to the needy and to the poor; give liberally and be ungrudging when you do so, for on this account the Lord your God will bless you in all your work and in all you undertake. Open your hand to the poor and needy in your land." This wasn't just a suggestion, but an admonition, sure and strong.

This voice became even stronger in the writings of prophets like Amos, Jeremiah and Isaiah. "What does true fasting mean?" asked Isaiah: "Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to shield yourself from your neighbor?"

From Jeremiah: "Thus says the LORD: Act with justice and righteousness, deliver from the hand of the oppressor anyone who has been robbed. Do no wrong or violence to the alien, the orphan or the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place."

And from Amos; "Thus says the LORD: For three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment; because they sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals— they who trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth and push the afflicted out of the way; ... The time is surely coming, says the Lord, when I will send a famine on the land; not a famine of bread or thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD. They shall wander from sea to sea and from north to south; they shall run to and fro, seeking the word of the LORD, but they shall not find it."

It doesn't take a genius to know of the wisdom of these words, and it doesn't take a saint to take them to heart and do more than sit on our hands about them.

If Lent is a time of repentance, confession and self-correction, it's important and helpful to know that we stand in a long line of those who have heard the words of justice and righteousness; and not just heard these words but acted on them, too.

The parable of the rich man and Lazarus, the unnamed and the named- becomes real to us in each and every generation, and really, each and every season we look up from our Bibles at the world in which we live.

It's all too true that we have many places we can look to respond in positive ways to those in need, aware that God knows the name of each and every one and loves us all the same. Fortunately for us, we are in the midst of a season when the ability to help make a difference for others, whether we know their names or not, is right at our fingertips.

Along with the season of Lent comes our Annual One Great Hour of Sharing Offering, one of the few special offerings we do here at Second, that makes specific, concrete, measurable improvements in people's lives around the world. www.presbyterianmission.org/oghs

Your gifts add up to make a real difference. I had to do a little research to find out how much help it all was. In 2017, nationally, over \$3 million was collected and distributed through the OGHS offering to its three branches. First, through Presbyterian Disaster Assistance for, among many other things, Trauma Counseling, Cholera Prevention Projects, Drought Relief and Well-digging and Compassion Fatigue Training. Second, the Presbyterian Hunger Program funds both food desert programs, like those here in Baltimore, as well as in projects in soup kitchens, community gardens, backpack programs, food pantries and more. Third, the Self-Development of People program includes assistance for running water systems in El Salvador, start-up youth led business in Mississippi, Sierra Leone, (and in Baltimore), literacy programs in Maine, and job training programs in New Orleans and Belize. The programs are all really unique and amazing.

In Puerto Rico, still devastated by Hurricane Maria last year, The Rev. Edwin González-Castillo, Stated Clerk of the San Juan Presbytery gives thanks for the help provided by Presbyterian Disaster Assistance. Just days after Maria hit, the first wave of PDA grants arrived and essential community needs were being met. Desperately needed items such as food, water, diapers and medical supplies were in the hands of hurricane survivors swiftly. PDA has continued to provide support in Puerto Rico long after other groups have left and is still going strong today.

In Uganda, Najjuma, a 56-year-old widow, depends on eight acres of farmland to feed three children and eight grandchildren left orphaned by the HIV/AIDS pandemic. However, her in-laws ordered her to leave the land her late husband had inherited. Thanks to training programs held by Action for Rural Women's Empowerment, a partner of the Presbyterian Hunger Program, Najjuma knew the law was on her side. She successfully appealed for help through local land-governance structures. Your One Great Hour of Sharing gifts helped Najjuma continue to farm the land and improve farming techniques in order to feed her children and grandchildren.

Here in Baltimore (yes!), Jubilee Arts receives grants through SDOP, to offer classes in visual arts, dance, ceramics and business in partnership with Baltimore Clayworks, MICA and a collection of area artists, writers and dancers.

Glenwood Life Counseling Center receives similar grants for their Medication Assisted Treatment program which provides therapy, education, medication, case management, and recovery services to approximately 700 clients and their families annually. In continuous operation since 1971, Glenwood Life is a state of Maryland certified ambulatory opioid- treatment program.

The Baltimore Youth Empowerment Network hosts financial literacy programs to help break the cycle of economic poverty, give our youth a sense of hope and empower them with the practical skills that can help them to manage their destinies and meet their dreams.

Named and unnamed, your giving helps bridge the chasm that separates people from lives of destitution to lives of wholeness. Your generosity fulfills a vision rooted in the words of Moses and the prophets.

We don't need to know all their names, but we do need to know how to respond...

Please consider taking part in this meaningful offering. In doing so, you set yourself right with Abraham, with Lazarus, and with the one who told this story, so that we would not just hear, but also act on these words of life; in Jesus' name. Amen.