

Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Wicker Park Lutheran Church

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Last week, in the first part of the “Learn the Liturgy” series, I mentioned that the scriptures invite us into the stories. As we conclude this two-part series with another short sermon, we’re offered a parable that exposes the many facets of our existence.

We're confronted with questions like: How are we similar to the rich man? How are we blinded to human-made condition of poverty and avoidant to resolving it? How do we blame God and others for the chasm of privilege that divides us while remaining oblivious to our role in it? With a simple glance in the mirror we realize that we don't know the name of the homeless person we see each day. And, then, when we realize the need for a change, we *still* use our privilege to demand that the oppressed individuals quench the burning realities of racism, sexism, and homophobia.

And, if the experience of the rich man feels foreign, then today's gospel also drives us to ask questions about how we are like the brothers who are oblivious or even avoidant to our own demise? We're forced to realize how we reject the prophetic voices that call us to love all of creation? Like, the times we pass off the observations of climatologists as lies, or the ways we tell people of color that their experience is exaggerated, or that sexual harassment was just a joke.

You see, it's easy to see ourselves in these stories. But, the power of a parable is that we don't need to feel pigeon-holed into one character. For, yes, we are like that rich

man and we are like those brothers, but we also experience life as poor Lazarus. We have moments where we are the ones who are overlooked until we have something to offer the system. We have moments where the gifts of the biblical and contemporary prophets sink into our being and we begin to align with God's vision. Moments where we come to partner with God to understand true justice and peace. Those moments where we feel so intimately connected with God's good gifts that we are enveloped in God's freely-given embrace of love, grace, and compassion.

So, today's gospel invites us to see ourselves in a variety of roles. It also calls us to recognize the ways we can truly listen, truly see, and truly respond to the gifts given by God. And at the same time, today's reading reminds us that, even when we feel invisible, we are seen, named, and loved by our God. Amen.