



TOUCH POINT

The Great Chasm – Touchpoint for September 24, 2025

Luke 16:19-31 (NRSVUE)

Jesus said, “There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. ²⁰And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, ²¹who longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man's table; even the dogs would come and lick his sores. ²²The poor man died and was carried away by the angels to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried. ²³In Hades, where he was being tormented, he looked up and saw Abraham far away with Lazarus by his side. ²⁴He called out, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am in agony in these flames.’ ²⁵But Abraham said, ‘Child, remember that during your lifetime you received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in agony. ²⁶Besides all this, between you and us a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who might want to pass from here to you cannot do so, and no one can cross from there to us.’ ²⁷He said, ‘Then, father, I beg you to send him to my father's house-- ²⁸for I have five brothers-- that he may warn them, so that they will not also come into this place of torment.’ ²⁹Abraham replied, ‘They have Moses and the prophets; they should listen to them.’ ³⁰ He said, ‘No, Father Abraham; but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’ ³¹He said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.’”

Grace to you from the Mystery in whom we live and breathe and have our being.

“Heaven is in your mind when love is in your heart”

I listened once to an interview with the late Brennan Manning, author of the Ragamuffin Gospel. In the interview, Brennan said something that has stuck with me. He said, “there is only one thing that separates people. It's not religion, race, gender or geography. It is those who are aware and those who are unaware.”

I think this is the essence of what Jesus is speaking of in the parable of the rich man and the poor man. There is no difference between the rich man and the poor man. The great chasm presented is in the afterlife, but there is a great chasm between the life they experienced on earth as well.

Jesus doesn't appear to want a theological debate on the afterlife. He is bringing awareness to anyone who will awaken from their worship of self. An awareness of those who sit at the gate and settle for survival food. Awareness of people's indolent self-indulgence.

Jesus told this parable, in a time when most people worked six days a week and ate meat but once a week. The Dives, they were called, owned most of the wealth and lived luxuriously. They ate with their hands, so they broke off pieces of bread to wipe them and tossed the scraps toward the gate where people like Lazarus would eat them.

The dualism presented between an actual chasm of those in hell being punished by God, and those comforted in the bosom of God, played by Abraham, is a metaphor. But it tells a true story of hell for someone in this life who goes completely unnoticed, hungry and longing for connection.

Other than the natural consequences suffered by the rich man, I don't see Jesus condemning someone for being rich. In the story the rich became aware too late. But in his new awareness, he asks Abraham to send a dead man to his brother on earth and tell him to become aware.

Jesus responds by saying in effect, if people do not have a willingness to listen to wisdom and become detached from the idol worship of self, not even the shock of a resurrected person will awaken them.

There is a great chasm not just in the afterlife of this story, but in the great chasm of awareness in real life.

The surprise of the story is the flipped script of the rich man going unnoticed at the gate of heaven and becoming the beggar.

In this story the rich man was completely unaware or didn't care about those who waited at the gate for scraps.

To become aware is to be enlightened. Humility turns on the lights.

But there are those who are unaware and do not care. There are also the rich who are aware and give generously to causes.

There are also the poor who are unaware.

Perhaps Jesus is also saying it is ours to bring the kingdom of Heaven to earth. That in the kingdom of heaven things are surprisingly upside down in the most surprising ways. We can flip this on earth with a choice to become aware.

It's not a threat, it's a parable! It is said to awaken us, not give us a debate topic on the afterlife. Jesus used scenarios that were relevant to the religious and societal beliefs of the time.

Jesus described the life of this man by saying he wore purple and fine linen. Reflecting the kind of robes High Priests wore. He was more than rich; he was called Dives. A Latin word for being an indolent, self-indulgent person.

I wonder how Jesus would tell this parable to our generation. What would represent the gate where people go unnoticed? What would represent the disparity of wealth?

Perhaps Jesus is saying it is ours to bring the kingdom of Heaven to earth. That in the kingdom of heaven things are surprisingly upside down in the most surprising ways.

For me the great chasm begins between my head and my heart. As the seventies Jesus Music rocker Larry Norman sang, "Heaven is in your mind when love is in your heart" Perhaps the reverse is also true.

Amen

Amos 6:1a,4-7

Alas for those who are at ease in Zion,
and for those who feel secure on Mount Samaria.

Alas for those who lie on beds of ivory,
and lounge on their couches,

and eat lambs from the flock,
and calves from the stall;

who sing idle songs to the sound of the harp,
and like David improvise on instruments of music;

who drink wine from bowls,
and anoint themselves with the finest oils,
but are not grieved over the ruin of Joseph!

Therefore, they shall now be the first to go into exile,
and the revelry of the loungers shall pass away.

Psalms 146:6-8

6 Who gives justice to those who are oppressed,
and food to those who hunger.

7 The LORD sets the prisoners free;
the LORD opens the eyes of the blind;
the LORD lifts up those who are bowed down.

8 The LORD loves the righteous;
the LORD cares for the stranger;
he sustains the orphan and widow,
but frustrates the way of the wicked.

Opening Song

Be Still

(London Fox Taize Choir)

Be Still, know that I am God.

Calm Me Lord

(Margaret Rizza)

Calm me Lord as you calmed the storm.

Still me Lord, keep me from harm.

Let all the tumult within me cease.

Enfold me Lord, in your peace.

Bible Passage

(A passage takes us from one place to another)

Touchpoint

(Where God's story touches our life story)

The Meal

The Lord's Prayer

(Monastery Choir of St. John of San Francisco)

Benediction

Gaelic Blessing/Deep Peace

(John Rutter, The Cambridge Singers)

Deep peace of the running wave to you. Deep peace of the flowing air to you.

Deep peace of the quiet earth to you. Deep peace of the shining stars to you.

Deep peace of the gentle night to you. Moon and stars pour their healing light on you.

Deep peace of Christ, of Christ the light of the world to you.

Deep peace of Christ to you.

Amen.