

Walls!

King of Glory Lutheran  
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Pastor Ruth Ann Loughry  
Year C: Pentecost 16: Luke 16:19-31

Luke 16:19-31 [Jesus said:] <sup>19</sup> “There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. <sup>20</sup> And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, <sup>21</sup> who longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man’s table; even the dogs would come and lick his sores. <sup>22</sup> The poor man died and was carried away by the angels to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried. <sup>23</sup> In Hades, where he was being tormented, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far away with Lazarus by his side. <sup>24</sup> He 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.’ <sup>25</sup> But 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. <sup>26</sup> Besides 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.’ <sup>27</sup> He said, ‘Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father’s house <sup>28</sup> for I have five brothers—that he may warn them, so that they will not also come into this place of torment.’ <sup>29</sup> Abraham replied, ‘They have Moses and the prophets; they should listen to them.’ <sup>30</sup> He said, ‘No, father Abraham, but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.’ <sup>31</sup> He 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.’ ”

*The rich man could plainly see Lazarus outside his gate. Yet he didn’t want to see him at all. Today, we build walls so we don’t have to see people. Christ breaks down walls between peoples. We will continue His work in our congregation and community.*

God’s grace and peace to us today!

This parable of Jesus is perhaps one of his simplistic. It is. There is a rich man and a poor man. Only one of those has a name. Both men die, one ending up in heaven and one in Hades.

We could start by talking about wealth and poverty. But we all know what extravagant wealth looks like. And we all know what object poverty looks like.

“An enormous and growing wealth gap separates a few—both individuals and nations—from the many who live in poverty. Sound familiar? First-century life within the Roman Empire was much like the reality we know, in this regard.”

(<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/ordinary-26-3/commentary-on-luke-1619-31-10>)

But we’re not going to start there.

We could start by talking about heaven and Hades. In terms of this parable, these are too distinctly separate places neither to be reached by the other. Or we could mention that the image of Lazarus resting in the bosom of Abraham inspired the African American spiritual “Rock My Soul in the Bosom of Abraham.

But we’re not.

Or we could mention these after-life stories of wealth and poverty being reversed were common folk stories in Jesus’ time. And Jesus point that we who are ‘rich’ need to assist the poor seems abundantly clear, making it all the more uncomfortable for us when we don’t use our wealth in this way.

But I don’t want to start at any of those places.

Instead... Let’s ask a different question. What do we know about walls? Quite a bit I think! In our world, there are huge walls. The Great Wall of China, the Walls of Babylon, The Wailing Wall or the Western Wall as it is also called, and the traveling, Vietnam memorial Wall.

Walls are erected to separate. To mark a boundary. To keep something in and something else out. Walls are made of fence post and two-by-fours. They are built of brick and mortar. Citadels are both walls and watch towers for military purposes.

Rich people build walls and poor people build walls with whatever supplies one can find. Rocks, wire, blankets... I once saw walls made of cement with hundreds of glass shards sticking out at the top so no intruders could climb over. Ingenious!

We aren’t told if the rich man had a wall around his house, but the story says he had a gate.

“Often there was a bench outside homes where the poor could wait for assistance. A beggar who sat on this bench at the gate could expect some sort of attention, especially from a feasting host and guests. And, as verse 19 says, this particular rich man feasted every day, meaning Lazarus was denied many times as the rich man repeatedly ignored the unwritten codes of honor. (Kendra <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/ordinary-26-3/commentary-on-luke-1619-31-8>)

Clearly, the rich man saw Lazarus often! If not every single day! In the afterlife it continued with the rich man being able to see Lazarus in heaven.

Today, we can escape that reality if we wish. We build walls when we don't wish to see others or how they live. Gated communities are designed not only for safety purposes but to keep particular kinds of people out. Fences are put up around tent refugee cities to keep those without permanent housing, or the correct religious beliefs corralled.

It's easy to hide behind the walls of our cars, or homes, or credit cards, when economics hurt some and not others. Walls are erected when youth are required to have team jerseys and equipment to play a sport; none of which they can afford. All of these and more keep us from seeing each other as we really live.

In the movie, ‘The Fence that Separated their Worlds’...During WWII, Bruno is an innocent 8-year-old boy, who is bored when his family relocates to the countryside. While wandering he comes across a barbed wire fence and another 8-year-old boy named Schmuel. Bruno doesn't understand why Schmuel is dressed in pajamas and has a shaved head. Together they begin talking and sharing a friendship with Bruno bringing Schmuel sandwiches to hand through the fence.

One day, Bruno asks his new friend. “You aren't allowed to go out?” Schmuel shakes his head (no). “Why? What have you done?” Schmuel answers, “I am a Jew.”

Jesus came to tear down all the walls we humans erect. Every. Single. One. People of God, it's Jesus! The church! You and I as Christians! **We have a message that can change the world! For it already has! What other group of people, has so few rules for becoming a part of a group? You're a baby-you're welcome! You're sick-you're welcome! Divorced or married, gay or straight - you are welcome!**

In Him, every wall and barrier has been broken down. Jew and Gentile, slave and free, men and women, tall or short, fat bank account and poor in spirit come on in. Rich in spirit with only five dollars in your pocket, come on in! There are no walls here to hide behind. Jesus sees each one of us for who we are, and as we are. God encounters us and more than that! God loves us with unending grace and love than we can imagine!

Oh, and by the way, sinners are the most welcome of all! Jesus said, “I come for the sinners, for the sick ones not for those who are healthy.”

That is the message! That is the message that our neighbors are longing to hear; even if they don't know it. To quote a line from Josiah Queen's Christian song, 'We got dust on our Bibles / Brand new iPhones / No wonder why we feel this way.'

Talk about the goals for 2026 - state them specifically – that's what we are supporting.

Let us dive ever deeper into God's word so that we can take it into our Hart and put it on the hard drive of our souls. Let us form amazing relationships with one another, where we can be so vulnerable that we trust one another with questions, our deepest joys and concerns! May we be a shining light in our community so that KoG is known for how we step out and step up to help others.

Let us use our wealth that we might always see our neighbors and love them like ourselves. **Let us build a longer table, instead of higher walls!**

Amen!