**2ND JUNE LUKE 16:19 – END and 1 JOHN 4: 7 – END**

The Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus

Jesus tells this parable within a large block of teaching. Earlier He had told the parables of the lost sheep, lost coin and prodigal son – all wonderful illustrations of God’s unceasing love for us.

Next Jesus told the parable of the shrewd manager, saying whoever can be trusted with very little can be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will be dishonest with much. Jesus concluded this parable by saying that no one can serve 2 masters, you either serve God or serve money.

I don’t think that Jesus is necessarily anti money but he is challenging where our priorities are and on what basis we make decisions.

Jesus illustrates this teaching further with the parable of the Rich man and Lazarus. The rich man is dressed in purple and fine linen – like the high priests of that time – such clothes would cost more than a years wages for an ordinary working man \*. And the rich man feasts, he doesn’t eat but feasts which implies gluttony, and he feasts every day, even the Sabbath so he was asking his servants to work for him.

And then there is Lazarus, (this is the only parable where a character is given a name, and Lazarus means *God is my help*) a beggar hoping for crumbs from the rich mans table. Lazarus cant even keep the street dogs away, animals that were considered unclean.

But when they both die their circumstances are reversed – Lazarus is with Abraham and in heaven whilst the rich man is in torment and agony. Strong imagery indeed.

The rich man was not deliberately cruel to Lazarus, he didn’t throw him out and he let him eat the crumbs from under his table. But the rich man was indifferent to Lazarus’ plight. He saw Lazarus – poor, ill, hungry and a beggar and he felt no compassion. He did nothing to help. But his wealth, his extravagant lifestyle was what he cared about, not the poor man literally right in front of him.

Our Oxford Diocese promotes the 3 C’s – to be courageous, contemplative and compassionate – compassion is concern for the misfortunes of others.

Our other reading from 1 John 4 develops this idea of compassion. ‘Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God because God is love’ God’s love for us moved him to action and he sent Jesus to bring salvation. The father in the parable of the Prodigal son is actively looking for his lost son and runs to him when the son finally comes to his senses and returns home repentant, a wonderful picture of God’s active love for us.

And says John, since God so loves us, we ought to love one another. Our response to the love of God is to love God and make his will our priority, and to love one another – and this love brings compassion.

If we see someone hungry, unwell, in poverty they are our neighbours and we, if we love them as Jesus told us to, will be moved with compassion. St John says that whoever does not love their brother and sister who they have seen, cannot love God who they have not seen. This is the same strong message as in Luke’s parable and its challenging –

It isn’t easy to like everyone

It isn’t easy when we disagree with someone, and I think loving our neighbour doesn’t mean we have to agree

I think it’s about respect, kindness and wanting the best for that person, it’s about compassion.

We cannot serve 2 masters – it’s a choice between materialism and God – and I would suggest that after hearing this parable that it’s an easy choice: to love and serve God.

But I think the consumer culture in which we live and the materialism of our society can subtly creep in and attract our attention. So this parable is a stark reminder for us to be aware, to be on guard and to challenge our priorities. As Christians we are called to love God and to love our neighbours with compassion.

\*Barclay