

Worship Service *“Sight Unseen”*

Pentecost 16, Year C, 25th September, 2022

1 Timothy 6:6-19 CEV / Luke 16:19-31 NRSV

Prelude

Opening Music

[Brother](#)

performed by Needtobreathe

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Welcome Guests / Announcements

Pass the Peace

Opening Hymn

To God be the glory

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Call to Worship [Responsive]

One: Come to this place and time of promise.

All: **We are becoming the house of hope, the field of sunflowers, the vineyard of great caring.**

One: Come to a shared commitment to abundance possible for all people.

All: **We are an earthenware jar, to keep safe the tomorrow of children. Our security question is – the word of God, and our password is love.**

Invocation

God of our hearts, you are our Physician in times of hurt; your balm heals our Wounds. You hear our prayers, intercessions and supplications. Your presence is pleasing to us and we welcome you. Together in your sanctuary we rejoice in your Embrace and offer you our boundless praise Amen!

Epistle Reading (Video)

[1 Timothy 6:6-19 CEV](#)

1 Timothy 6:6-19, Pursuing God's Justice A weekly bible reading, from the lectionary, narrated by Douglas Brown. Text from CEV : the Contemporary English Version Copyright © 1991, 1992, 1995 by American Bible Society. Used by Permission. Pictures from commons.wikimedia.org Sound FX from freesound.org

And religion does make your life rich, by making you content with what you have.

We didn't bring anything into this world, and we won't[a] take anything with us when

we leave. So we should be satisfied just to have food and clothes.

People who want to be rich fall into all sorts of temptations and traps. They are caught by foolish and harmful desires that drag them down and destroy them.

The love of money causes all kinds of trouble. Some people want money so much they have given up their faith and caused themselves a lot of pain.

Timothy, you belong to God, so keep away from all these evil things. Try your best to please God and to be like him. Be faithful, loving, dependable, and gentle.

Fight a good fight for the faith and claim eternal life. God offered it to you when you clearly told about your faith, while so many people listened.

Now I ask you to make a promise. Make it in the presence of God, who gives life to all, and in the presence of Christ Jesus, who openly told Pontius Pilate about his faith.

Promise to obey completely and fully all that you have been told until our Lord Jesus Christ returns.

The glorious God is the only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords. At the time that God has already decided, he will send Jesus Christ back again.

Only God lives forever! And he lives in light that no one can come near. No human has ever seen God or ever can see him. God will be honored, and his power will last forever. Amen.

Warn the rich people of this world not to be proud or to trust in wealth that is easily lost. Tell them to have faith in God, who is rich and blesses us with everything we need to enjoy life.

Instruct them to do as many good deeds as they can and to help everyone. Remind the rich to be generous and share what they have.

This will lay a solid foundation for the future, so they will know what true life is like.

A Time of Prayer

Joys and Concerns

Pastoral Prayer (ending with the Lord's prayer)

Lord, your word tells us that there is great good in godliness combined with contentment; that as we brought nothing into this world, so we can take nothing out of it. Help us, dear Lord, to be content with what we have; to seek heavenly treasures rather than those things of this world which rust corrodes and moths consume. Grant that we might be people who share the wealth that you have provided; that we might be ones who share both the bread and wine of earth and the bread and wine of heaven...

Lord hear our prayer...

Father, we especially pray today for those who like Lazarus are ignored or neglected and left to suffer in our world; those who live in poverty within our town and province, and those who lie in great suffering at the gates of our nation.....

O God, bind your people together and make us bright and shining witnesses to your compassion and your grace as they are revealed in the law and the prophets and in Christ Jesus, the one you raised from the dead....

Hear too, we pray, the petitions and the intercessions of our hearts for those who govern and are in authority; for those who lost in sin and despair; for those who need healing; and for those who seek to serve as Jesus served.

We ask these things and we give you our thanks and praise, and our minutes and our days, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who taught us to pray as one family, saying

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

Thy kin-dom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.

Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kin-dom, the power, and the glory, forever and ever, Amen.

Hymn *There's a Wideness in God's Mercy*

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Gospel Lesson Luke 16:19-31 NRSV

‘There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day.

And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man’s table; even the dogs would come and lick his sores.

The poor man died and was carried away by the angels to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried.

In Hades, where he was being tormented, he looked up and saw Abraham far away with Lazarus by his side.

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.”

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.

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.”

He said, “Then, father, I beg you to send him to my father’s house—

for I have five brothers—that he may warn them, so that they will not also come into this place of torment.”

Abraham replied, “They have Moses and the prophets; they should listen to them.”

He said, “No, father Abraham; but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.”

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.””

Message – *Sight Unseen*

When we journey through the world around us, what do we actually see? Certainly we register the images in our vision, seeing what's in front of our eyes. But what do we actually take notice of? It probably depends on what our activity is at the time. If we are driving, we probably focus on the traffic around us, the road signs, the road surface, and some of us may keep track of our speed as well. Many of the other details our eyes pick up such as the scenery that passes by may just blend into the background.

I know after I had been here for a year or so, I realized as I made my routine drive to work, I had a fantastic view of the Cascade mountains that I never took notice of anymore, just keeping my gaze focused on the road in front of me. Likewise, if we're hard at work on our computers, or watching the television, we probably don't give much notice to the other details in the room such as the decor or the pictures on the wall.

What we see and actually take notice of is a major component of the parable in today's reading from Luke. Luke's gospel focuses frequently on the faithful stewardship of goods. This story adds to this general injunction to generosity by providing a narrative of the proximity of the rich and poor, bringing this aspect to the foreground. “Rich” and “poor” are not left as vague generalities, but are depicted as two men, one inside the gate of abundance, and one outside. Their close proximity accentuates the fact that Lazarus appears invisible to the rich man. Even after death, when the rich man gazes across the abyss to see Lazarus in Abraham's bosom, he speaks of the poor man in the third person – as if he were not there.

This text presents us with the great moral challenge of seeing, and then making visible, the invisible suffering of the world. Indeed, this may be one of our most important moral challenges of today. Our global network of communication allows us to be more aware of the world's suffering than ever before, but we have become adept at ignoring the suffering

that is right at our own doorstep. Maybe these two things are connected; the more we become voyeurs on the far away suffering of others, the more impotent we feel to do anything about pain and injustice. Despair and cynicism tempt us to close our eyes to suffering and shut down our overloaded sympathies.

In his writing titled *Confessions*, early church father Augustine analyzes his own attraction to plays that depict tragic and sorrowful events. He notes that “in the capacity of the spectator, one welcomes sad feelings; in fact, the sadness itself is the pleasure. Next he asks, “How real is the mercy evoked by such fictional dramas? The listener is not moved to offer help, but merely invited to feel sorrow.” One might wonder whether our capacities for global communication create a similar result, producing spectators who are invited to feel sorrow but are “not moved to offer help.” Instead with one click, we move to a new site or channel. This distance, or remoteness from the issues of injustice and suffering are highlighted in this passage through the obvious illustration of the socioeconomic differences between the two main characters.

Once upon a time there were two men, one rich and one poor. The two players do not interact. This is simply the way things are. There is a clear division of status. The reader can relate and probably prefers to be related immediately to the rich. Who, after all, would want to be the hungry one lying in someone's doorway? Most of us would not want to imagine such a need and, in truth, cannot. We almost inherently feel kinship with the rich man's perspective. This morning I'd like to share a poem with you by one of my favorite poet's Robert Frost, titled *Mending Wall*. In this piece, Frost wrestles with the irony of neighbors who long to have clear boundaries on their neighborliness. Listen to the author himself reading the poem aloud.

[Video - Mending Wall written and read by Robert Frost](#)

That piece makes a powerful statement about the practice familiar to us all of making boundaries between one another, doesn't it. The author wonders aloud why it is we divide ourselves without a valid need, yet acknowledging that there is something about us that likes those clearly defined boundaries of what's my place and what's yours.

In our parable today, there is little interaction between the two men as well. The rich man is not disdainful of Lazarus, he simply does not notice him. Lazarus, for his part, keeps his gaze focused on the rich man's household, hopeful for the crumbs from his table. The only one who notices Lazarus at all is the dogs, who in a grotesque show of how low a man can fall lick the wounds of the poor man.

This is a story all about boundaries: between the rich man and Lazarus, in this world and in the next. Perhaps the boundaries and walls we have drawn are not so much between us and others as between us and the Divine. Do we really see the face of God in those outside on our doorsteps? Or do we like the divide that separates us? In our poem today, Frost

winds down with these thoughts, “Before I built a wall I'd ask to know what I was walling in

or walling out.”

So this morning, consider who is on the other side of that door, consider who we pass and simply do not see. In Matthew 25, Jesus tells us he is Lazarus: He is the one lying at our door hungry and thirsty. He is that one imprisoned and cut off from “decent” society. He is the marginalized one that you can just as easily walk by. That is God's Christ who stands at our wall, knocking. When we answer, we may not find someone who looks like us, but we may very well find someone who looks like our God, if we are paying attention, if we truly see what is really in front of us. Amen.

A Call to Serve

God's love is steadfast and abundant. We are blessed to give from hearts of love that others might experience abundance. May the gifts we bring be used to supply whatever balm is needed, wherever it is needed. May these resources be used to facilitate the wholeness of all.

A Time for Reflection - *Musical Interlude*

The Prayer of Thanksgiving

We have the means to give, we have the reason to give, and there are many waiting for us to give. Yet often, our hands hold back, and we hoard what we have for Ourselves. God of grace, help us live and give in your kingdom of love, where there are no enemies, only brothers and sisters, and kindness is the air we breathe. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Hymn ***Brothers and Sisters of Mine*** **142**

Benediction

May we leave here with new eyes, To see the need we often fail to notice
To see the face of Christ in need all around us To recognize the walls we build to keep
ourselves in, And too often others out And a new will to tear down walls and lift up
those we find without. Amen

Postlude