

2022 25th SEPTEMBER WORSHIP AT HOME – Life before death

Dear friends,

This week we read that Jesus tells a parable about an unnamed rich man and a poor man named Lazarus. In this life, one of these has all the comforts while the other has nothing – but in the afterlife their fates are reversed. Jesus challenges his audience not to neglect the demands of justice in this world. We have to consider whether we walk the walk or just talk the talk. Can we begin to build the kingdom of God here and now – if so, what can we do to make it a reality? Quite a challenge for us to consider and take up.

Every blessing, Margaret

Call to worship:

Praise the Lord! Everything in heaven and earth praise the Lord!

Praise the Lord all creation – sun, moon, and shining stars.

Praise the Lord, sea and land – animals, birds, and all nature.

Rulers and nations, young and old together – everything, everywhere, praise the Lord!

Amazing and loving God, as we come together through our reading now, inspire us by your word – renew us with your Spirit – and unite us as we worship you, our creator, redeemer, and sustainer. **Amen.**

So let us approach our God – a God of justice and of love.

A God who hears the cries of those in need, and who calls us to live in loving ways.

May we draw near to God – and may God draw near to us.

: father, Son, Spirit – the triune One. **Amen.**

Our Father who art in heaven hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come and 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. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil for thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory for ever and ever. **Amen.**

The words to 'Lord of all hopefulness' written by Jan Struther [Joyce Placzek] [1901-1953] StF 526

1 Lord of all hopefulness, Lord of all joy, whose trust ever child-like no cares could destroy,
be there at our waking and give us, we pray, your bliss in our hearts, Lord, at the break of the day.

2 Lord of all eagerness, Lord of all faith, whose strong hands were skilled at the plane and the lather,
be there at our labours, and give us, we pray, your strength in our hearts, Lord, at the noon of the day.

3 Lord of all kindliness, Lord of all grace, your hands swift to welcome, your arms to embrace,
be there at our homing, and give us, we pray, your love in our hearts, Lord, at the eve of the day.

4 Lord of all gentleness, Lord of all balm, whose voice is contentment, whose presence is balm,
be there at our sleeping, and give us, we pray, your peace in our hearts, Lord, at the end of the day.

Prayer:

God of kindness and compassion – God of fairness and justice – God who sees all and hears all, we worship you.

God of infinite love and boundless hope, who calls us to life with you, now and always, we worship and adore. **Amen.**

O guardian of our hearts, so often we have focused on the wrong things and turned away from those who need our help.

Whether through thoughtlessness, presumption, or fear, we have not embodied the abundant life you offer us.

Re-tune our hearts to your Spirit and your perfect love, motivate us to find ways to helping, even when we feel limited or without resources.

May we never turn away from doing something because we cannot do everything.

Help us be light wherever we are, not keeping it to ourselves, but working together to show your generosity forgive us, restore us, and guide us, we pray. **Amen.**

Loving God, thank you that it is not too late.

Every day is a new chance to serve you, to love others and to be the people you made us to be.

Thank you for forgiving us when we get it wrong.

Thank you for always being willing to begin again.

May we dispense kind words and generous actions.

May we be known for an attitude of love that honours you and all you have made. **Amen.**

Our Father who art in heaven hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come and 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. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil for thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory for ever and ever. **Amen.**

Luke 16: 19-31: [The Message - translation made by Eugene Peterson]

There once was a rich man, expensively dressed in the latest fashions, wasting his days in conspicuous consumption. A poor man named Lazarus, covered in sores, had been dumped in his doorstep. All he lived for was to get a meal from scraps off the rich man's table. His best friends were the dogs who came and licked his sores.

Then he died, this poor man, and was taken up by the angels to be the lap of Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried. In hell and in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham in the distance, and Lazarus in his lap. He called out: 'Father Abraham, mercy. Have mercy! Send Lazarus to dip his finger in water to cool my tongue. I am in agony in this fire.'

But Abraham said: 'Child, remember that in your lifetime, you got the good things and Lazarus the bad things. It is not like that here. Here he is consoled, and you are tormented. Besides, in all these matters there is a huge chasm set between us so that no-one can go from us to you, even if he wanted to, nor can anyone cross over from you to us.'

The rich man said: 'Then let me ask you, Father. Send him to the house of my father. I have five brothers, so he can tell them the score and warn them, so they don't end up here in this place of torment.'

Abraham answered: 'They have Moses and the Prophets to tell them the score. Let them listen to them.'

'I know, Father Abraham,' he said, 'but they are not listening. If someone came back to them from the dead, they would change their ways.'

Abraham replied: 'If they won't listen to Moses and the prophets, they are not going to be convinced by someone who rises from the dead.'

Comment. The Pharisees laugh at what Jesus has been saying because they were lovers of money. [Luke 16: 14 says: 'The Pharisees, who loved money, heard all this, and were sneering at Jesus.']. Jesus scolds them with a searing condemnation of their hypocrisy which pays huge attention to what people think of them, but scant regard to how God sees their hearts. Then, in a reversal of the norm, Jesus accuses them of breaking the Law – usually it is the other way round when they accuse Jesus! – by not welcoming and

helping the poor. And this has consequences, which Jesus demonstrates in the highly eschatological* parable which closes this section.

It is a graphic commentary on Jesus' teaching in the Beatitudes [Luke 6]. The rich man is fabulously wealthy – the poor man is totally destitute but notice that it is only he who has a name. [Church tradition has named the rich man Dives which is the Latin for rich']. Both die and their fortunes are reversed as Lazarus is comforted in the bosom of Abraham while the rich man is tormented in the flames. Having not lifted a finger to help Lazarus, the rich man now expects Lazarus to help him, but Abraham says this is not possible. So, the rich man asks that Lazarus be sent to his brothers to warn them – but Abraham says that they already have all the warning they need – even someone rising from the dead won't change them and their ways. Perhaps verse 31 is a wistful prediction that the Pharisees will never change, even after Jesus has been raised from the dead.

But eschatological though the parable certainly is, the point of it is what is happening in this life. Lazarus would not have been destitute if the rich man had lived according to the Law. Lazarus would not have lost his land – probably swallowed up into the rich man's estate because of debt [this parable is part of the same world as the earlier story about the unjust manager].

The point is that the law and the prophets clearly spell out what God expects of his people regarding the poor. The hypocrisy of the Pharisees is that, while heeding some of the Law, they ignore important parts of it – including this key area. The disciples, however, should live by the values of the kingdom that uphold the Law's emphasis on helping the poor, on sharing our possessions with those in need, on graciously welcoming all – as God welcomes us.

*Eschatological – part of theology concerned with death, judgement, and destiny

Meditation of a Pharisee; [from A Most Amazing Man C by Nick Fawcett]:

He's gone too far this time, he really has! That parable of his – the one about the rich man and Lazarus – you know who he was getting at, don't you?

That's right – us, as usual. It was a familiar refrain, all that nonsense about refusing to listen to the Law and prophets – the message veiled, but clear enough.

But then he threw in a *new* accusation for good measure – one too ridiculous for words, suggesting that even if somebody were to rise from the dead, we wouldn't listen to them – still wouldn't believe their words.

Honestly, who does he take us for? *Sadducees*??

Of course we would believe! Wouldn't you? Wouldn't *anyone*?

It would be obvious, wouldn't it, that *God* was at work, for he alone can defeat the grave. He thinks we're bigoted, does he – so set in our ways – that nothing will open our minds to his so-called truth?

Well, I tell you what – if Jesus is so certain about things, let's help him die and see if he can rise again himself. That would settle things, wouldn't it? Show one way or another if he's right or wrong.

For I tell you what, if he can do that, conquering death itself, only a fool would argue.

Prayer:

Forgive us, Lord, for we fail to hear your voice, and too often it's not that we *don't* but that we *won't*, our minds closed to what challenges and disturbs. Consciously or otherwise, we dig our heels in, resisting awkward questions – unwilling to contemplate anything that might call for change, whether in attitude, lifestyle, or beliefs.

Open our hearts to the truth which alone can set us free and give us courage to listen to what you would say, so that we may grow in faith and understanding, and live more faithfully for you. **Amen.**

Gracious God, help us to build bridges between:-
those who have a lot of friends and those who are lonely,
those who have clean water and food and those who go hungry,
those who have security and those who have fled their homes,
those who have made good choices and those longing to begin again,
those who feel safe and those who live in fear of violence.
Help us to build bridges – to pray bridges – and to be bridges. **Amen.**

Illustration used by David Adam [Sermon Illustrations] and taken from *The Little Prince* by Antoine de Saint-Exupery.

I know a planet where there is a certain red-faced man. He has never smelled a flower; he has never looked at a star. He has never loved anyone. He never does anything in his life but add up figures. And all day long he says over and over, just like you: 'I am busy with matters of consequence,' and that makes him swell with pride. But he is not a man – he is a mushroom!

A what?

A mushroom.

[His insensitivity made the man less than human.]

**The words to 'For all the saints who showed your love' by John L. Bell [b.1949] & Graham Maule [b.1958]
Singing the Faith 746 and sung to the tune O Waly Waly**

1 For all the saints who showed your love in how they lived and where they moved,
for mindful women, caring men, accept our gratitude again.

2 For all the saints who loved your name, whose faith increased the Saviour's fame,
who sang your songs and shared your word, accept our gratitude, good Lord.

3 For all the saints who named your will, and saw your kingdom coming still
through selfless protest, prayer, and praise, accept the gratitude we raise.

4 Bless all whose will or name or love reflects the grace of heaven above.
Though unacclaimed by earthly powers, your life through theirs has hallowed ours.

Closing Prayer: Lord, help me not to mind the gap between me and those who have more than me;
between my lifestyle and the lifestyle of others,
between my achievements and the achievements of others.
Rather, may I be blessed with the generosity to share, and the wisdom to be content – that trust,
compassion, and thankfulness may stay close to me. **Amen.**

May God be in your choices and your plans;
may he bless you, and all those you seek to serve.
In Jesus' name, **Amen.**