

## **Sermon 9 29 19**

**Look at this phrase from our collect. “O God, you declare your almighty power chiefly in showing mercy and pity.” Who in their right mind would do that today? Who would declare power by showing mercy and pity?!? Mercy and pity seem to be in short supply these days.**

**Now, I don’t mean to brag about him, but I will for a moment. Please indulge me. My father was a good man. Not many people knew all that he did. He was very quiet. He believed in behaving like a Christian. So he did, but he wasn’t showy about it. We didn’t find out about a lot of what he did until much later.**

**Dad had two men who worked for him. Nick was a gardener, a really good gardener and Dad hired him to take care of the plants and trees around the mortuary. He did a *great* job. Everything looked neat and trimmed and really well put together. Then we started hearing stories about Nick. He was losing it, Alzheimers or some sort of dementia, I guess. But Dad still went to his house twice a week to pick him up, sometimes to just come and sit in the back room twice a week, until he couldn't come any more. But he still had his job and that meant something to Nick.**

**Then there was Rueben. Now Rueben was a special case. Dad asked him to do odd jobs around the mortuary. He was always a very cheerful guy, but he could be kinda wiley. Rueben had Downs**

syndrome, but he understood everything and people could understand him. So it would lead to conversations like this. “Rueben have you seen the screwdriver? It’s missing.” “Nope.” “You *sure* you didn't see the screwdriver? You were the last one with it.” “Nope.” Some time would go by... and then, “Well lookie here! This looks just like that missing screwdriver! How’d that get here?! Well, whaddya know?! Looks like we found it, Rueben!” “YA!” (Big smile.) It was a miracle!

This was the sort of thing that enlivened my Dad’s days. It enlivened *everybody’s* days. And it was well worth the couple of extra bucks he spent to keep everybody entertained. It all turned out OK.

There are a group of us priests in our convocation who get together every Wednesday afternoon to discuss the readings that are coming up, in two weeks. And two weeks ago, we discussed this gospel, and one of our number quoted his father, “The best way to get out of a hole is to stop digging.” Hmmmmmmm. Probably good advice. There was no point in going after Rueben. He was a good guy to have around.

It’s so easy to get stuck, isn’t it? Even easier when we don’t *realize* that we’re stuck. In our gospel, I am quite certain that the rich man just never saw Lazarus outside his front door. He never saw Lazarus at all. Lazarus was just this clump of rags that

**somebody should probably clean up... someday. No personality, nothing, just a clump of rags that happened to hold a human. But certainly nothing of any worth. The rich man saw him every day. He even knew his name.**

**Did you notice? Lazarus has a name in this story. The rich man does not. He could be anybody. He could be everybody. Now remember, it's not that the rich man couldn't have shown mercy and pity. He just didn't notice. He wasn't paying attention.**

**However, the rich man remembered Lazarus' name when he asked Father Abraham if Lazarus couldn't dip just the tip of his finger in water to cool his tongue. Suddenly, Lazarus became important enough to be remembered. Hmmmmm. Worth remembering when he can help you out?!**

**But Father Abraham had more to teach the rich man - and us. He reminded the rich man that he had known comfort in his lifetime and Lazarus did not, and even more important, "between you and us a great chasm has been fixed." Not just a chasm of unreachability, but a chasm of incomprehension. "Please warn my living brothers!," the rich man begs, but Abraham tells him, "They have Moses and the prophets, and all the lessons of the Bible to warn them. They know how to live. They just aren't doing it, no more than you ever did."**

**And then we have a moment of irony that speaks to us in our age. “But what if someone goes to my brothers from the dead, someone like me, that’ll work!” And then Father Abraham says, “No. If they are not willing to listen to the lessons from the Bible that teach us how we should treat each other, why will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead to speak to them?” Hmmm?**

**And then we are left to wonder how many were and are convinced of how to live, convinced of salvation because Jesus rose from the dead? Jesus said those words knowing that is exactly what he was going to do. And he is justifiably speculating - will my resurrection have any meaning whatsoever?**

**He is asking a basic question of Christianity - Can we accept the miraculous? Or was Jesus just a really nice guy? Can we buy in?**

**Father Abraham knew that the rich man’s brothers, well-established in their comfortable lives couldn’t buy in. Look at me! Look at how comfy I am! No way am I going to end up in eternal torment! Incomprehensible! That’s all just fairy tales and fantasy! It’s not real! There’s no such thing as eternity with God!**

**This little parable asks us —**

**Are we willing to risk it?**

**Our collect prays to God, acknowledging God’s almighty power, acknowledging that he declares his power by showing mercy and**

**pity. So is the door always open? Let's not follow the path of the presumptuous rich man. Lets gratefully accept God's mercy and pity. Let's accept the fullness of God's grace and *run* to obtain God's promises. So that we, as Paul says, may take hold of the life that really is life.**