

September 21, 2014 “Are You Convinced?” Luke 16:19-31

As we begin this morning there are several things that need to be said to put the balance of this message in context. Jesus was teaching. The disciples were paying attention. Because of other things Jesus had said,...other stories he had told...the Pharisees and some in the crowds that gathered when Jesus taught....were sneering. Making fun of him. Making fun of His doctrinal stance. All of those dynamics are part of the context of Luke 16:19-31. There were people present who were not taking Jesus seriously.

But I want to make this clear. This message is not about scaring people. It is not about giving people bad dreams, or robbing them of their joy. Part of the context of this portion is John 3:16. “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him might not perish but have everlasting life.” Part of the context of this portion is the 17th verse of John chapter 3. “For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him.” Remember those verses as we work through this portion in Luke 16.

I have gone through the 12 verses that make up today’s lesson and distilled seven things that Jesus tells us clearly. Seven things that Jesus affirms about the reality of life on earth. When I planned this service, earlier in the week, my

brother-in-law Douglas Allan Irvine was alive. He was hanging on by a thread but he was alive. Thursday evening as we were about to sit down to dinner we received word from Thunder Bay that he had succumbed to the illness with which he was diagnosed last summer. There is an added poignancy to the passage when you digest it in that context. Please bear with me.

The first thing Jesus affirmed to those who were listening to Him on that day, admittedly a mixed crowd....believers, friends, acquaintances, strangers and scoffers and enemies....is that there are some people who find life easy. They find life beautiful. For the most part they have a good time. I suppose I would have to put myself in that category. I have always had work. Whether it was as a student going through University, and even Seminary, I have not had a time from 1967 to the present when I did not have a way to make a living. I worked briefly in industry...Saskatchewan Wheat Pool # 7 in Thunder Bay. I taught school for two years. English and History at the High School level. When I entered Seminary, Knox College, I served a 3point rural charge. My first acquaintance with Southern Ontario. Three charges as an ordained minister. I managed to juggle full time work in North Eastern Ontario and Doctorate studies. I managed to juggle starting a church from zero and the completion of Doctoral Studies. I retired and found pulpits available to me on a regular

basis. I am sure some would say I have had an easy life. I count my blessings most days. Jesus said there are people who find life to be like that. They marry and have families. My late mother-in-law would have put it this way...if they fell in a puddle of poop, they would wind up with an armful of roses. Jesus said, good, bad, indifferent, there are people who find life a smooth road.

He also said there are people who live in abject poverty, and who suffer continually as a result. And sometimes these who are poor and who suffer do so under the very eyes of people who find life...comparably easy. An easy way to say this perhaps over simplifying the point is there are people who are rich and there are people who are poor. You and I do not think of ourselves as rich. But when we consider the whole of the world, and conditions in which people live and struggle to live...our arguments that we are not rich tend to run like water through our fingers. Jesus point was there are people who find life easy. And there are people who find life hard. As easy as the rich man tradition has called Dives found life, Lazarus struggled in every way. Life was continuously difficult. Continually painful. Here is what I conclude from these first two points. Jesus was talking about real life in the real world. He was not blind to what was happening....more aware in fact than some, like the Pharisees. And Jesus did not think it funny that some find life easy, while some find it very hard.

Here is the third thing Jesus told the crowd that day. For everyone....no exception....death comes calling at the appropriate hour. The man who had it easy, he died. The man who lived a hard and brutal existence, he died. There is no creature on this earth that lives and has breath, that is an exception to this law of life. Life begins at our time of birth. We can argue about whether or not that includes the 9 months in the womb or some part thereof. We can not deny the reality. Life begins and life ends. Death awaits us all. Each new day is a gift. And the number of them is limited. I do not say this to make you feel bad, it is a fact. God willing I will turn 70 this winter. I have lived most of my life. My life will end, I believe at the moment, and by the means that God chooses for me. If I do something dangerous or stupid, I may even contribute to the end of my life. You may think this is not uplifting. I say what Jesus said....it is a fact. The rich man's wealth could not save him. The suffering man, Lazarus was not immune.

This story that Jesus told is a story of contrasts. The poor man, this beggar, who was poor and sick and pain ridden, died and went to heaven. And here is the point to be remembered, Jesus affirmed there is such a place. Do not ask me to place it in the created realm, I cannot do so. What Jesus affirms is that the time of Lazarus' death arrived and the angels carried him to Abraham's side, the side of the man which the

whole of Scripture portrays as the man who believed God and followed Him. Poor Lazarus went where believers in a Jewish-Christian context are believed to go. Heaven.

The 5th point is the opposite of the 4th. Jesus says the rich man who had lived in luxury also died and he went to Hell. And it was an awful place. Being a place of torment, the rich man could see the poor man Lazarus in heaven. And because Hell was a place of torment he wanted out. He wanted pity. He wanted water to cool his tongue. He wanted a second chance and if not for himself at least for his brothers so they might not make his mistake. And the mistake would appear to be that the rich man did not take seriously that he could wind up in this place of torment. Did he scoff at Biblical teaching? The law and the prophets? Was he just careless and thinking maybe sometime I will consider those things? We are not told. What is apparent is this...he did not go to that place where believers are carried upon dying by the angels.

Point 6 is this. Jesus said there is a place, a heaven to which believers go when they die. Jesus said, there is a place of torment to which those who do not believe go. And there comes a time when there is no more time to consider where you would like to spend eternity. For both the rich man and the pauper who suffered greatly the time of choosing what might happen next is passed. And there is no going back, no

escaping the eternal lot that has become yours. Time is limited. And time runs out.

The 7th point is this: the Holy Scripture alone tells us these things or talks about them. Moses and the prophets in the Old Testament. The Gospel writers and the letter writers of the New Testament are unique in this, having walked with God and walked with God in Christ, they talk to us of eternity and eternal things. They address the need for faith and the matters of faith. Yes they talk about right and wrong, rules by which to live but always cast in the context of living with God and walking before Him, realizing that time is fleeting, and that death and dying are a part of the nature of a fallen world in which sin dogs our steps.

If Jesus said it once He said it many times. God loves you. He made you. He wants you to live your life for Him and with Him and what is more when life in this earthly body comes to an end He wants you to share with Him in eternal life. I pose this question not to make you uncomfortable but that you might have complete and utter peace. Are you convinced? Jesus was and is a realist. His story about the rich man and the poor one who found life in this realm so hard makes the point that there is nothing save the word of God which will answer the questions we all need to answer regarding eternity. God loves you. He does not want you to perish. He wants you to

live. He sent Jesus into the world, not in order to condemn the world but to save it.

I am going to ask you to pray with me. Let us talk to God concerning that which He has revealed in His word.

Heavenly Father;

Thank you that there are things which you have revealed in the Scriptures. Thank you for sending Jesus into the world to redeem whoever would trust Him. Hear us as we align ourselves with Jesus and your word. Help us to trust you day by day in this field of time until we are called away from it. Grant that taking your word seriously we may have the peace of the forgiven, and may enjoy what you have made available for those who believe you. We trust you for this life, and for the next. Amen