

Trinity 15

I stand here in need of God's mercy and grace. May I speak in the name of the God, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

What does it mean to be rich? What does it mean to be poor? Recent research has revealed that people who make six figures or people who are actually millionaires do not see themselves as wealthy or rich, they would describe themselves as comfortable, but not wealthy. On the other hand, there are people with families on living wage or less, that if they encounter need seem to amazingly find ways to help out and share of what they have. And if we take a more global view the reality is, that much of the global population lives with significantly less income and resources than the average person living in the UK. What does it mean to be rich? What does it mean to be poor?

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.

Did the rich man realise he was rich? Or did he consider himself simply comfortable? Need is certainly written all over the story of Lazarus.

This story that Jesus tells has many layers and through the centuries much has been thought, written and said about it. It's a weird story and for various reasons it is a story that makes many people uncomfortable. It makes people with money and possessions uncomfortable, because

they wonder what this might mean for them. And it also often makes people with very little uncomfortable. Is Jesus saying that well, it doesn't matter if you are exploited, starving, homeless and without medical care, because you will have it that much better in the afterlife? Really, so suck it up and wait to die? Is that all God has to say to people who are treated as less than human because of their poverty?

The story of Lazarus and the rich man is not an easy story. It is an uncomfortable story. It is a story that challenges the world as it is, it challenges our relationship to what we have, money, houses, cars, food. It challenges how we view and understand ourselves and others in relation to money. Lazarus and the rich man. In our world the names of wealthy people are known and preserved. Over in the Old Churchyard there are beautiful monuments built to remember the names of people with wealth. Yet there are hundreds of people buried there, who did not have the money to pay to be remembered. The names of the poor don't matter, are often unknown and easily forgotten. Lazarus and the rich man. As Jesus tells this story he turns the ways of the world on its head, the poor man has a name, Lazarus. The rich man stays nameless. God knows and remembers the names of the poor; their names matter to God.

What does it mean to be rich? What does it mean to be poor? Is it wrong to be rich? Is it wrong to enjoy good food and nice clothes, to have a lovely home? I don't think there is anything inherently wrong with any of these things. What Jesus challenges with the story of Lazarus and the rich man is not nice things money can buy. What Jesus challenges is our relationship with our fellow human beings, wealth and God. God cares about justice. God cares about the human dignity and the welfare of all, even the smelly, unkempt homeless person unpleasantly asking for

money, and the well-dressed, well-fed, home-owning person who makes six figures. Both these people are beloved by God, both are made in the image of God. God cares about the flourishing and the human dignity of both, but one of them is not flourishing and their human dignity is being trampled on a daily basis.

We do not need great riches to have enough to eat, wear decent clothes and have a home to live in, but we all need money for these basic needs. Yet some people do not have what it takes to cover basic needs and others have enough to cover those basic needs several times over, yet still often feel like it might not be quite enough. But people with money, they have worked hard for it and they deserve to enjoy it, it is their money, they have earned it, right? And well, some people who have not even what it takes to cover basic needs, well they might have made some unwise decisions, are they even trying to sort themselves out? There might be some truth to both, and it is good to remember that there is much of a person's life story we might be unaware of. Be it someone with wealth or someone living in dire need and poverty, we are often tempted to judge, without knowing a person's story.

But no matter what, the story of Lazarus and the rich man challenges our relationship with money, our fellow human beings and God. What does Jesus' story tell us? God cares about justice and God cares about each human being, about the wellbeing and flourishing of each human being. Where the wellbeing and flourishing of a human being is disregarded in favour of one's own comfort, God will balance the scales. Because in the end, all belongs to God, all of creation, whatever we own is only temporary, truly, we only steward things for a time. And at the end we need to stand before God and justify how we have stewarded what has been entrusted to us. Both rich and poor. And what God cares most

about is how we have used what was entrusted to us to ensure the flourishing and wellbeing of our fellow human beings and all of creation. Have we paid our taxes, which finance social care, free education and health care for all? Have we paid extra, when we could, for products that are more sustainable and protect the environment? Have we given thought to what we might be able to share with others, how we might help to meet the basic needs of those who do not have enough? How have we stewarded God's resources?
Amen.