

Proper 21, Year C

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What you do with what you got

It's not just what you're born with, it's what you choose to bear. And it's not how large your share is, but how much you can share. And it's not the fights you dream of, but those you really fought. It's not just what you're given, it's what you do with what you got.

Those are the words of song writer Si Kahn. I was very tempted to just sing the sermon and leave it at that. But then it would be way to short!

But I like those words:

It's not just what you're born with, it's what you choose to bear.

And it's not how large your share is, but how much you can share.

And it's not the fights you dream of, but those you really fought.

It's not just what you're given, it's what you do with what you got.

It occurred to me that that song pretty well with today's Gospel. Sometimes people can get quite caught up with what they have, what they inherited or was handed to them, even dreams of what they wished they had. TV commercials and social media posts send this constant message that it really matters what you have, and if you don't have what they have, here's how to get it.

It's true now, and it was true in Jesus' day. Wealth was considered a blessing from God, so if you had a lot of it, God must be really pleased with you. But Jesus, who went around with pretty much nothing in his pockets, knew a blessing when he saw it. And blessings weren't just meant for the people who received them, something to collect or brag about. They were a gift from God to be shared.

So he told his followers this story, to make sure they understood how God's gifts work, or God's Kingdom comes to us.

The fellow in the story, he wasn't just well to do. He had more wealth than anyone who was listening in to Jesus' story. Here's the tip off. Purple clothes. Does anyone here love to wear purple? Anyone wearing purple right now? Well back in Jesus' day, purple cloth was really hard to come by. Only kings and very rich people could afford it. And you didn't just wear it any day of the week. That would be really showing off.

So here was the guy wearing purple clothes. And he wasn't just eating lunch either. He was having a feast. The kind reserved for holy days and holidays, the kind you'd invite people over to share. And here he was eating it all by himself.

And meanwhile, here was poor Lazarus, sitting right outside his door in full view, hungry and sick and all alone. He wasn't even begging, he was just sitting here. Hoping. It was clear he didn't have anything. Only the dogs felt sorry for him, and came to keep him company. Cause dogs are great. (and don't forget next week we're blessing pets, so mark you calendar)

And the rich man ignored him.

Eventually both men died. Because that's what happens to everybody. But the poor and the hungry die sooner. And sooner or later the wealthy catch up to them.

Back in Jesus' day they imagined that when everyone died their spirits went to a place called Sheol. There were special sections, for good people and for not so great people. If you were really lucky you got to hang out with some of the great friends of God, like Father Abraham. And that's where Lazarus went, carried by the angels and placed in the arms of God's friend Abraham.

Now that rich man was really surprised when he died and didn't get such a great place to spend the afterlife. He thought it all had to do with what he had been given – his purple clothes, and his stacks of money, and his banquets of food.

He must not have paid attention in synagogue on Saturdays because he should have known better than that. All Jesus' people, the people of Israel, knew that when it came to God's judgements -- it's not just when you're given but ... what you do with what you got.

And the rich man didn't do anything with what he'd been given. And he didn't even get the message when he died. He thought that Lazarus should be sent to do him special favors. Which makes him not only clueless but a bit conceited as well – thinking maybe that people like Lazarus were put on this earth to serve people like himself.

And even with Father Abraham told him that it was too late, he hoped maybe Lazarus could be sent to convince the rich man's brothers, who were still alive, to change their ways. I guess they hadn't paid attention in Synagogue on Saturdays either. They would have plenty of chances to learn on their own.

Because there were plenty of people like Lazarus out there, probably hanging out on his brother's own doorsteps. Offering those brothers a chance to do something good with what they got.

And that's what we get as well. We get to learn how to give from the people who ask, or who need us.

So what have we been given? What have we been blessed with? Raise your hand if you have something you're thankful for?

Gather a few answers....

So we have a lot to be thankful for, but what are we to do with what we got? I mean you can't just give your mom and dad over to someone. Or your kids –tempting as that might be.

But it seems to me that the love that comes from those relationships can surely be shared. Love like that helps us recognize the Lazaruses in our lives, who maybe don't have family, or friends, or good food to eat, or dogs to come keep them company. And we might just be the way they find what they need – love, or lunch of whatever.

Last week Jesus asked us to consider who is our master – is our master God, or are we mastered by other things – what we have, or what we achieve, how good we are at something, or the kind of friends we want to have.? Jesus said if you try to be mastered by both God and these other things, you'll always choose one and disappoint the other. If holding on to these other things is more important than holding on to the God of love, you'll find that it might be hard to hold on to people as well. Because you have to have your arms free to reach out to people. When our arms are free we can not only give but we can receive from each other as well – and it's that giving and receiving that are the two sides to loving in the way that God wants us to love each other.

And God does give us good things –a world that offers up family, and friends, and food we like, and a community to live in. God has a hand in what we're born with, and the share we have, the dreams we dream, even the things we're willing to fight for. But in the end:

It's not just what you're born with, it's what you choose to bear.

And it's not how large your share is, but how much you can share.

And it's not the fights you dream of, but those you really fought.

It's not just what you're given, it's what you do with what you got.

Amen.