

Blessed are the homeless, for their home is in heaven
The Rev. Dr. Martha Tucker
September 29, 2019



Blessed be God who animates our lives and calls us to see, truly see, our neighbors, that we might make the invisible visible, that love may be known. AMEN

When I attended seminary in Cambridge Mass, I would walk almost daily into Harvard Square for one reason or another. No matter what route I took, no matter what time of day, I would encounter the homeless. Many were drug users or mentally ill, but not all. Many of them became familiar and my colleagues and I would engage them in conversation. One of the most startling and memorable encounters occurred when during one very brief conversation a gentleman said not many people look at me, most pass by. Looking at me means more than giving me money. Thank you.

Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven...

Just recently one of my colleagues who still practices ministry in the Boston area described an encounter with a man, seeming to be a stranger, in a subway. She looked at him; he looked at her. She felt something familiar. One of them, perhaps she, asked: Do I know you? He responded: Yes, I was homeless in Cambridge. You and your friends used to stop. I now live in a group home and have a job as a janitor. I am getting by. She blessed him. My friend was overwhelmed with emotion. When she told me the story she was still processing the divine connections between all of us.

Blessed are the merciful for they shall receive mercy...

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we say in my vocation that these are stories which will preach!

And these are stories which, I believe, illuminate today's Gospel.

Luke has continued to press us on the dangers of wealth and the blessedness of poverty. Fully formed and faithful stewardship resides in the understanding of this Gospel. Sitting in the center of his parables are notions of lost and found, repentance and conversion, scattering the seeds of faith and wisdom. All lessons in this ordinary time point us to the extraordinary Kingdom and teach us to be disciples, stewards and Kingdom bearers.

No less, the parable of Lazarus and Dives (dives by the way is actually not his name but instead means simply rich man). Lazarus and the rich man may then be caricatures, characters in a play, metaphors for life.

at the gate, which may be a threshold into the Kingdom, we find a poor diseased man named Lazarus. across a great divide, in what may be hades, there is a conversation between him and the rich man who still treats him as a lowly servant. the rich man desires rescue from the flames of hell; the beggar, the untouchable, lies a chasm away, an impassable chasm away but lies in the bosom of Abraham. Separated in life; separated in death...at least for a moment.

Realizing that there is no hope for him the rich man asks Lazarus for help for his family. Here too the chasm of understanding separates. But there may at least be some slight turning from selfishness.

The suggestion is made that in order to be blessed with the resting in the bosom of Abraham, representing arrival in heaven, one must

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traverse this chasm from rich to poor, from ego to selfless, from heartless to compassionate, from materially wealthy to poor in spirit

this journey, this pilgrimage we are all on, is not only about the endpoints, it is about the chasm as well. it is less about the destination than it is about the journey, the how do we travel? our attitude, our orientation toward God, our compassion.

In fact the great challenge of this text is that of seeing and making visible the suffering of the world, no matter how rich, no matter how privileged. this is our sacramental responsibility.

this improbable parable at the end of Luke's lessons on money and power, embodies all our Christian formational learnings: the two great commandments, the law (Moses) and the prophets, the beatitudes and our baptismal covenant.

Thou shalt love the lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy mind and with all thy soul; Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.
Self, neighbor and God...Love

Moses who offered the law and the prophets may be identified with the critical passage from the prophet Isaiah: Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them...
when you SEE the naked....do something...respond with love and compassion.

Blessed are the poor in spirit...not the poor, but the poor in spirit who have emptied all they have or been emptied in order to be filled with the Spirit of Love. blessed are the merciful...mercy results from true understanding

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and finally, the closest to us everyday, our covenant to respect the dignity of every creature...how do we respect dignity when we don't see or hear in fact, obscenity has been defined as

Understanding of this parable invokes memories of our own encounters with God's oppressed creatures and our responses thereto.

In sum, when we hear this parable we may be meant to ask ourselves where are we in this formative journey; where have we seen, really seen the underserved, and responded as the commandments, the prophets, the covenants and the beatitudes would have us.

when have we emptied ourselves of preconceptions and fear and selfconsciousness to reach across that great divide and touch the untouchable?

when we have, we have acted with mercy, we have acted with compassion, we have become the poor in spirit, we have recognized the meek. we have blessed and become a blessing...

You hold in your hand an image of one of the many sculptures by thomas which realistically dot our world, in parks and outside churches and skyscrapers; it is the image of Jesus as homeless. It is hard to walk by one of these without stopping; it should be no less difficult to walk by the real thing.

It is a reminder of all that this Gospel teaches; it is a reminder of Matthew 25 that whatever you do for the least of these you do for me; it is a reminder of the Truth which sets us free, albeit subversive and countercultural.

I imagine that before he died Dives passed by, stepped over and around, ignored Lazarus. and he is represented as no closer in death!

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I imagine that before we die we have the opportunity because of stories like these to pause before doing so ourselves, and to see, look at really look at, the oppressed the poor the homeless

when we see, gaze into the soul of, the other, the marginalized, and respond compassionately, we are loving the neighbor as God desires

when we see, gaze into the soul of the other, the marginalized, and respond with mercy, we are respecting the dignity which we have promised to respect in our baptismal covenant

when we see gaze into the soul of the other, the marginalized, and respond by pouring out our spirit into their emptiness to assist them, we join the blessed inheritors of heaven

and when we see gaze into the soul of the other, the marginalized and respond with meekness, the gentleness of the intention of all the law and the prophets feeds the hungry, restores the margins

every day, every single day we have the opportunity to make our spirit poorer, to become more humble, to shed our arrogance and false entitlement. we do this when we see, really perceive, the diseased, the hungry, the oppressed who suffer because the rich, the dives of the world, fail to look at them, gaze at them, respond to them.

It is our responsibility
to be so re-formed
when we Recognize the oppressed

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May you be blessed with the power to see, really see, the world in all its wonder and in all its pain. May you be blessed with the poverty of spirit which allows you to respond as a Kingdom bearer. May you then be the blessing which flows into the world and heals and transforms in God's name. AMEN

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