

Sermon Note: Crumbs from the Table

Fourth Sunday in Lent

Introduction

As we continue our Lenten series *The Last Supper: Conversations That Led to the Cross*, our focus shifts. The first three weeks gave us a reckless sower, an expanding guest list, and a father who throws a party before his son can finish apologizing. This week, the table is still set... and someone is lying outside the gate. In Luke 16, Jesus tells the story of a rich man who feasts lavishly every day while a poor man named Lazarus sits outside, covered in sores and hoping for scraps. The rich man has stopped seeing the person right in front of him, and Bishop Willimon's central question returns: *Who is God, and what is God up to?* This week, the answer is unsettling: God sees those we choose to ignore.

Illustration Video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=psW7sLoNutA>

In this clip from *Hotel Rwanda* (2004), a journalist who has filmed atrocities during the Rwandan genocide tells a hotel manager how the world will respond to the footage.

Why This Video?

In this brief exchange, Paul (Don Cheadle) assumes that seeing will lead to action, that footage of this magnitude will move the world to intervene. Jack (Joaquin Phoenix) knows better. He has watched atrocity reach the public eye, and he understands what happens when the viewer has nothing at stake. This observation exposes the gap between witnessing suffering and actually responding to it.

Video Discussion Questions

1. Paul believes the footage will move people to act. Jack predicts they'll say "that's horrible" and go back to their dinners. What makes Paul's assumption so reasonable, and what makes Jack's prediction so likely?
2. Jack doesn't seem angry when he says it. What do you hear in his tone?
3. Paul asks, "How can they not intervene when they witness such atrocities?" Have you ever asked a version of that question? What were the circumstances? What happened next?
4. What is the difference between seeing something and witnessing it?
5. We live in a world where images of suffering are constant and accessible. Does that access have any impact on our capacity to respond? If so, what impact?
6. Paul and Jack are both in the same hotel, surrounded by the same crisis. What separates the way each of them processes what is happening?
7. After this exchange, Paul must face the realization that help may not come. Have you ever had to act knowing that the help you expected wasn't on its way? What inspired this action? What was the result?

Luke 16:19-31 (CEB)

¹⁹“There was a certain rich man who clothed himself in purple and fine linen, and who feasted luxuriously every day. ²⁰At his gate lay a certain poor man named Lazarus who was covered with sores. ²¹Lazarus longed to eat the crumbs that fell from the rich man’s table. Instead, dogs would come and lick his sores.

²²“The poor man died and was carried by angels to Abraham’s side. The rich man also died and was buried. ²³While being tormented in the place of the dead, he looked up and saw Abraham at a distance with Lazarus at his side. ²⁴He shouted, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me. Send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I’m suffering in this flame.’ ²⁵But Abraham said, ‘Child, remember that during your lifetime you received good things, whereas Lazarus received terrible things. Now Lazarus is being comforted and you are in great pain. ²⁶Moreover, a great crevasse has been fixed between us and you. Those who wish to cross over from here to you cannot. Neither can anyone cross from there to us.’

²⁷“The rich man said, ‘Then I beg you, Father, send Lazarus to my father’s house. ²⁸I have five brothers. He needs to warn them so that they don’t come to this place of agony.’ ²⁹Abraham replied, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets. They must listen to them.’ ³⁰The rich man said, ‘No, Father Abraham! But if someone from the dead goes to them, they will change their hearts and lives.’ ³¹Abraham said, ‘If they don’t listen to Moses and the Prophets, then neither will they be persuaded if someone rises from the dead.’”

Scripture Study Questions

1. The rich man is never named. Lazarus, whose name means “God helps,” is the only character in any of Jesus’s parables who receives a name. What do you make of that reversal?
2. Bishop Willimon observes that the rich man doesn’t oppress or abuse Lazarus. He simply never sees him. What kind of failure is that, and how does daily luxury make it possible?
3. Even after death, the rich man asks Abraham to “send Lazarus” to him with water, and then to “send Lazarus” to warn his brothers. What does this tell you about how deeply his assumptions about Lazarus run?
4. Abraham describes a “great crevasse” fixed between them that no one can cross. When was that crevasse created, and by whom?
5. The dogs lick Lazarus’s sores. In the world of this parable, what does it mean that the only creatures who come near him are dogs?
6. Abraham tells the rich man that his brothers already “have Moses and the Prophets. They must listen to them.” What does this say about what is required to see the people at our gates?
7. The parable ends with Abraham saying, “If they don’t listen to Moses and the Prophets, then neither will they be persuaded if someone rises from the dead.” What do you hear in that line, given who is telling this story?

Weekly Action

In this week's parable, Jesus highlights the problem of proximity without awareness. Pick one routine this week (a commute, a grocery run, a walk through your neighborhood) and slow down enough to notice who might be present that you normally don't see. Pay attention to your body language, what you do with your eyes when you encounter someone asking for help. Do you look away? Do you cross the street? Do you check your phone?

On a piece of paper or in a note on your phone, write down honest answers to these questions: *What did I see that I normally miss? What made it easy to miss before? What keeps me from seeing?* Take your answers to God in prayer, ask God to show you what you might be missing, and what one step might help you to see more clearly.

Prayer

God who sees, you know every Lazarus by name. You see the ones we walk past, the ones we've learned to look through, the ones lying just outside our gates. Forgive us for the comfort that has narrowed our sight. Teach us to see what you see, and when we do, give us the courage to cross the crevasse we have created. Amen.