

Date Preached	25-Sept-2022	Date Initiated	06-Sept-2022
Where Preached	SAK	Appointed Readings	Proper 21, Yr C

From today's collect:
" O God, you declare your almighty power chiefly in showing mercy and pity "



I don't know how many of you recognize [*dangle*] this humble piece of rubber. Like, no doubt, many of you, Jim and I had the pleasure of having Monty Besmer as our newspaper delivery person until he retired a year or so ago. The paper was never late or soggy or the slightest bit wrinkled, even in the wettest or iciest of weather. And it always came neatly folded in one of these giant rubbers bands. Until we moved to Kent, I'd never seen one so large! I recycled *most* of them back to Monty, but I'll admit that we also kept a stash ... because they're just so handy. And one of them happened to be near me as I began contemplating the parable Jesus tells today of Lazarus and the rich man.*

As I mentioned last Sunday, we're in the midst of a series of difficult lessons in St Luke's gospel, and this one is no exception. On the one hand, the image Jesus paints of the rich man is extremely unattractive: elegantly and expensively dressed as he feasts "sumptuously" every day ... while poor, hungry, uber-humble Lazarus maintains a hopeless vigil outside the rich man's gate—just in case *one day* he has a change of heart and offers Lazarus even a crumb from beneath his groaning table. On the other hand, however egregious the rich man's sin-of-omission in ignoring poor Lazarus' plight—and it *is* egregious—the sentence of eternal damnation the rich man is given ... without comfort ... without mercy ... without even a warning back to his living relatives ... seems unbearably harsh. [*band up and taut*] It appears that the rich man has stretched God's mercy and pity to such as degree ... that they've finally [*snap*] snapped. [*down*]

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Autumn brings the creation season of the Church's year: the season whose usual themes are harvest and abundance ... giving God the first-fruits of what we've taken in and laying up the rest for the future. But in *this* season ... in *this* time ... those themes just don't seem adequate. In a season when, every morning, the newspaper brings accounts of rivers so low that long-sunken ships and previously unmapped hazards are suddenly visible above the waterline; ¶of out-of-control wildfires ... and glaciers and polar ice caps melting at rates without historical parallel; ¶of routine tidal flooding in low-lying areas all over the world ... and deadly heatwaves, in more and more unexpected places; ¶of mountain snowpack at less than fifty, or sometime even twenty-five, percent of normal levels ... and catastrophic flooding in Pakistan that has displaced tens of millions of people and wiped out virtually all of this year's crops, nationwide; ... ¶and of a now-decades-long drought in our own Midwest bread basket that's beginning to give pause about our *own* food supply.

No, in a season such as this, we cannot contentedly give thanks for God's seemingly unlimited abundance and feast on our own plenty ... but continue to ignore the Lazarus lying at our own gates: the changes in the climate and the evolving environmental 'normal' that ... like Lazarus

* The traditional, but non-scriptural, name for him is "Dives" (pronounced DĪ-vēs), the Latin word for WEALTHY.

for the rich man, *should* be discomfiting us and calling us to right an awful wrong ... but that we continue to sinfully ignore, in ways that sorrow Jesus' heart.

Sitting at our tables of abundance and security, we must see Lazarus in the billions of people in this world who live under real, imminent threat of the consequences of climate change: famine, flood and heat; the ravaging effects of increasingly extreme weather; the loss of livelihood and the disintegration of families as centuries-old ways of agricultural life are suddenly no longer viable. *This* Lazarus, too, knows little other than privation and poverty. Endures loss of agency ... of dignity ... and, perhaps, even the hope (let *alone* the means) to continue living.

From our lofty vantage point of knowledge and power—that is, possessing both the awareness of need *and* the means to address it—we must see Lazarus in Planet Earth itself. We might disagree about the human dimensions of climate change: whether people have brought about their own suffering ... about whether governments and NGOs are doing enough to combat it ... about the cool, cool calculus of how much each nation 'ought' to kick in to help stave off these very real threats.

But as long as these differences slyly distract us, they evilly obscure the one inescapable, existential need we—and *all* living creatures—have *in-common*, which is the very existence of the earth itself: its continuing to be a viable, sustainable, dynamic host to all the life God has created and given into our care. If it's hard to picture the *human* 'Lazarus'—a poor, starving, baking, flooded-out individual or family ... try, instead, envisioning Earth—our "fragile island home"[†]—not as the big, beautiful blue-and-white marble spinning in space that we're all familiar with ... but as a brownish-grey, muddy, smoky, swampy smudge in the Milky Way that ... a few centuries from now ... **tells** explorers from light-years away a cautionary tale of human excess and complacency.

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[take broken band] What *is* the *real* point of Jesus' parable of Lazarus and the rich man? The rich man's fate is harrowing, but do God's mercy and pity ever actually snap **[hold up]**? Can they ever be stretched *too* far, such that our consumption ... our ignoring ... our failure of basic charity ... actually condemn us? Is Jesus warning us that we risk forfeiting our own salvation? **[put down broken; pick up whole]**

I don't think so. But He *is* imploring us to take cognizance of how **[stretch VERY tightly]** taut our earthly existence has become and, unlike the rich man, *do something about it*. To see how far we've wrenched the resources of creation to our own selves ... and consciously **[small release]** let up a bit. To acknowledge the unbearable pressure all our consumption and robust profits have heaped upon the finite systems of this earth ... and, in mercy, **[modest release]** release them. To grasp how close to snapping we've stretched and strained the **Lazarus-es** of this world ... many, many peoples, not to mention millions and millions of *other* species ... and take pity: to relax our grip on this Earth and let it resume **[full release]** the normal, healthy shape God gave it in the beginning ... so that it—and *they*—may continue to exist ... and maybe, by God's grace, even thrive. **[down, but hold]**

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Today's collect reminds us of a gracious mystery: that God shows forth God's greatest power in mercy and pity. The story of Lazarus and the rich man ... far from telling of the *end* of

[†] Eucharistic Prayer C, *BCP*, p 370.

God's mercy and pity [**snapped band**] ... reminds us that we, *too*, exercise this power ... when we show mercy and pity to *others* [**limp band**] ... in the very same way Jesus always offers them to us.



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