

“Be Convinced”

September 29, 2013

Luke 16: 19-31

¹⁹ "There was a rich man, who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. ²⁰ And at his gate lay a poor man named Laz'arus, full of sores, ²¹ who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table; moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. ²² The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died and was buried; ²³ and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes, and saw Abraham far off and Laz'arus in his bosom. ²⁴ And he called out, 'Father Abraham, have mercy upon me, and send Laz'arus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am in anguish in this flame.' ²⁵ But Abraham said, 'Son, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Laz'arus in like manner evil things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish. ²⁶ And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us.' ²⁷ And he said, 'Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father's house, ²⁸ for I have five brothers, so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment.' ²⁹ But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.' ³⁰ And he said, 'No, father Abraham; but if some one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' ³¹ He said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced if some one should rise from the dead.'"

Most of us can remember a special event, a moment in time when it is almost so unbelievable it is hard to compute. Well there was once this guy, we will call him Chad, and he took his girlfriend, we will call her Kara, out to this really romantic restaurant for dinner. What you need to know is that the two of them had been dating for over a year and he had already asked for her parent's blessing on their one-year anniversary. So here, it was December, almost eight months later, and they are at this incredibly romantic restaurant. A magician picks them out of the crowded restaurant and he folds playing cards into a box for some trick as they are waiting to be seated. In her head, she thinks "oh man, this might finally be it". The trick culminated in a beautiful rose but no ring. Then dinner came and the lighting was perfect, the music was romantic and he proceeds to tell her that he wished he could give her a ring but he could not right now. She understood, or at least she was trying to be supportive and understand. The dinner concludes and they head back to his place to watch some new movie they had picked up that evening. The movie finally ends and he gives he gives her an early Christmas gift of an adorable bear, he tells her to press the paw and out comes the question "will you marry the big furry bear?" She responds with "are you serious?" (As an aside, she did upon convincing that this was 'for real' say yes.)

Here we rest in Luke where Jesus gives us two people separated by wealth, the rich man and the poor man. You see before we are told this story by Jesus, Luke gives us the scenario of the Pharisees ridiculing Jesus for his statement that "...You cannot serve God and Money" (Luke 16:13). Luke informs us that the Pharisees were lovers of money themselves so Jesus in Luke: 15 says to them "You are those who justify yourselves in the sight of others; but God knows your hearts; for what is prized by human being is an abomination in the sight of God." According to scholars, the other part of Jesus' response is in three illustrations that show how God overrules our human, as evidenced by the Pharisees, self-justification.

Our scripture today is the third of those illustrations. We have the rich man. We are even given a description of him. He is dressed in purple and fine linen. He feasted sumptuously every day. He even lived in a gated community protected from any and all who would try to get his riches unjustly. We know a bit about him but are never given his name, only his description.

We then in contrast have the poor man, Lazarus, whose name we know and is a common name that means appropriately enough "God is my help." This poor man is also given a description. He resides at the gate of the rich man. He is covered with sores and longs to satisfy his hunger with crumbs from the rich man's table. He is even licked on by the dogs of the streets.

Well, both men die. One, is carried away by angels to Heaven to be with Abraham and the other, goes to be tormented in Hell. We do not often talk about Hell in church. But this is a pretty rough description of torment. Can you picture it? Not only is the rich man enduring the fires of hell but he is forced to see the poor man, whom he interestingly enough knew by name, and who he probably daily passed, with Abraham, the sainted and revered Abraham and a great chasm separates them that the rich man will never be able to cross.

But here is the thing. That rich man had a lot of opportunity while he lived to make it to the other side. He had so many chances to get it, to be convinced. He tries to claim that he needs mercy, he was not aware of the torment he would endure. But Abraham says you knew of this torment. He then tries to get Lazarus sent to his brother's house so that if they were adequately warned, unlike himself is the undertone there, they might repent. Abraham again says no they have been adequately warned as he was adequately warned.

While Jesus comes teaching and preaching the message of love and grace as a general truth this scripture is a little bit of the consequences of our choices in this life. Jesus does not really sugar coat that we are given so many opportunities to do right, to be just, to be loving to one another and to live out the lives worthy of our callings.

Yet we have our wonderful and radical Jesus. He says that we deserve what we get as consequences for not seeing what is right in front of our faces and acting on it. For blaming someone else and for self justifying. Jesus says we are making excuses and because we are so wrapped up in those excuses, even someone returning from the dead will not convince us to believe.

This is a problem for us here and now. We are too much like the rich man. We try to say well I could not do this because of this, I did not because, I will not because. Because, because, because. Because becomes a refrain and an excuse in of its self. We are not so removed from the Pharisees who try to justify their actions and their faith understanding. Yet those same Pharisees are so caught up in their excuses that they no longer live out their faith.

So where does this scripture bring us today? Are we the Pharisees, or are we able to stand up and say I am convinced, convicted, and confess that I believe.