

Gospel Lesson for the Week

September 30, 2007

18th Sunday after Pentecost

Please read [Luke 16:19-31](#)

Read also [Jeremiah 32:1-3a, 6-15](#); [Psalm 91:1-6, 14-16](#);
[1 Timothy 6:6-19](#)

"There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man's table; even the dogs would come and lick his sores.

The poor man died and was carried away by the angels to be with Abraham.

The rich man also died and was buried. In Hades, where he was being tormented, he looked up and saw Abraham far away with Lazarus by his side.

He called out, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am in agony in these flames.'

But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that during your lifetime you received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in agony. Besides all this, between you and us a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who might want to pass from here to you cannot do so, and no one can cross from there to us.'

He said, 'Then, father, I beg you to send him to my father's house-- for I have five brothers--that he may warn them, so that they will not also come into this place of torment.'

Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the prophets; they should listen to them.'

He said, 'No, father Abraham; but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.'

He said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.'"

Geography of the Soul

It occurs to me, as I read Jesus' story,
that what seems on the surface
to be about the geography of heaven and hell,
is really more about the geography of the soul.

It still amazes me

whenever I see one of those gadgets
that can tell me where to go,
“Turn left onto Lincoln Boulevard,
turn right on Main.”
But in our story, Father Abraham is no GPS.
He’s more like Yogi Berra who once remarked,
“You can’t get there from here.”
That’s just what Father Abraham says to the rich man,
“The gulf is fixed; you can’t get there from here.”

And that may all be true,
but to our benefit,
the word of Father Abraham
is not the bottom line.
In the biblical GPS.
“G” stands for “grace,”
unmerited and underserved,
but richly, abundantly
open to us, and through us.
There is no automated voice
to give directions;
only the deep voice within,
guiding us from here to there,
from the daily hell of selfish isolation
to the paradise of mutual loving service.

Do you remember that old vision of heaven and hell? According to the story, heaven and hell are depicted as banquet halls, laden with every sort of rich and luscious food, and in both the inhabitants are equipped with long spoons strapped to the ends of their arms.

In heaven, the people are well fed and happy; in hell, they were angry, irritable, very cranky and very hungry.

The difference: In hell the residents are doomed to constant frustration as each tries to feed himself, only to find that the long spoons will not reach their mouths.

In heaven, however, there is joy and contentment as the residents, using the attached spoons, feed each other.

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