

“Get Real” 9/26/2010 Kenmore UMC

I Timothy 6:6-19, Luke 16:19-31 Rev. Dr. Peter LeValley

The gospel challenges us to seek after the life which really is life, pursuing a life of wonder, faith, love, steadiness, and gentleness.

On the way home from church, a little boy asked his mother, “Is it true that we are made of dust?”

“Yes, darling.”

“And do we go back to dust again when we die?”

“Yes, dear.”

“Well, mom, when I said my prayers last night, and looked under the bed, I found someone who is either coming or going.”

Sometimes it seems like we don’t know if we are coming or going. More importantly we are not sure of what we are going after. When we turn to God’s Word it is amazing how clear what is real in life can all become.

What parable would make a man with three doctoral degrees (one in medicine, one in theology, one in philosophy) leave civilization with all of its culture and amenities and depart for the jungles of darkest Africa? What parable could induce a man, who was recognized as one of the best concert organists in all of Europe, go to a place where there were no organs to play. What parable would so intensely motivate a man that he would give up a teaching position in Vienna, Austria to go and deal with people who were so deprived that they were still living in the superstitions of the dark ages for all practical purposes. The man who I am talking about, of course, is Dr. Albert Schweitzer. And the single parable that so radically altered his life, according to him, was the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus.

Suddenly, life with purpose and meaning became real.

Do you remember the series of Coke commercials from several years ago, that said through beautiful music and beautiful people experiencing the good life in one form or another, that Coke was the Real thing. A beer the high life.

Well, I have often wondered what was real about diet caffeine free coke. More importantly what is real about our pursuit of more.

In this parable of the Rich man and Lazarus it is disconcertingly real what endless wealth can give us. And Paul makes it abundantly clear that *“the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil.”* And then he goes on to tell Timothy, to tell us, what it is we should pursue: *righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness.*”

And Paul goes on to tell Timothy to say to those who have wealth to: *not be haughty or set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but rather on God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous and ready to share.*

They are, as we are, to *take hold of the life that really is life.*

The issue is not desire for money, but why.

So that we can provide for the things we need for our family, so we can share out of what we have with those in need.

So we can experience the fullness of life as we give our lives away.

So we can see and know what is real and see those who have real needs and be a part of the solution rather than the problem.

It is about looking beyond ourselves to others.

We have entered the political season again, and once more gentleness has nothing to do with those who seek power. In fact it seems the catch phrase comes from the sixties movie that had the line, "I'm mad as hell and I'm not going to take it anymore."

In this political climate it would seem naïve to say as Petersen phrases Paul's words, *pursue a righteous life – a life of wonder, faith, love, steadiness, courtesy*. And yet the endless grasping after things we will never have enough of and blaming others as to why; is not the life God wants for God's people. For you and I.

"*Righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness.*" is the life that is real, that really is life.

From dust we have come and to dust we shall return, that is real. What we do and what we pursue is what gives substance and meaning to our lives. It makes our lives real. To be about about relationships, about caring for others and all God has entrusted to our care, it is about community. It is about seeing the needs and utilizing the gifts God has shared with us to meet the needs around us, whether it be Lazarus at our door, or the hungry and the homeless, the victims of oppression and violence around the corner and around the globe. It is seeing beyond ourselves; our wants and desires, to all that God wants for us and wants us to share.

Barbara Brown Taylor commenting on this parable says.

"there is very little guilt in this story. As far as I can tell, the rich man does not feel badly about anything except the place where his life of luxury has landed him. But remember: this story is for us, not against us. Jesus may have enjoyed snatching knots in the tails of his money-loving listeners, but I would be surprised if that were all he wanted. Even when he got angry he got angry for a reason, usually because he could not stand the way people loved the things they could get for themselves better than the way they loved the things God wanted to give them. They were satisfied with linen suits and sumptuous feasts when God wanted to give them the kingdom. They were content to live in the world with beggars when God wanted to give them brothers and sisters. They were happy to get by with the parts of the Bible that backed up their own ways of life when God wanted to give them a new life altogether. (now and for eternity)

What they do not seem to know,

- What we still do not seem to know
- in that we are the victims of our own way of life, is:

When we succeed in cutting ourselves off from each other, when we learn how to live with the misery of other people by convincing ourselves that they deserve it, when we defend our own good fortune as God's blessing and decline to see how our lives are quilted together with all other lives, then we are the losers.

Not because of what God will do to us, but because of what we have done to ourselves. Who do you think fixed that chasm in the story? Was it God or the rich man? Sometimes I think the worst things we ever have to fear is that God will give us exactly what we want.

On the other hand what we can hope is that we would turn our lives from our wants and desires to what God wants and hopes for us, namely "*take hold of the life that really is life!*"

When Moses asked God to tell him what his name was so he could tell the Egyptians who sent him, God said to tell them "*I am*" sent him. The One who exists and caused everything in the world, you and I and all, to exist is Real. We are God's children

So I say to you **Get Real!**

Prayer by Mother Teresa

Dearest Lord, may I see you, today and every day, in the person of your sick, and whilst nursing them, minister unto you. Though you hid yourself behind the unattractive guise of the irritable, the exacting, the unreasonable, may I still recognize you. "Jesus, my patient, how sweet it is to serve you."

Lord, give me this seeing faith, then my work will never be monotonous. I will ever find joy in humoring the fancies and gratifying the wishes of all poor sufferers.

Sweetest Lord, make me appreciative of the dignity of my high vocation, and its many responsibilities. Never permit me to disgrace it, by giving way to coldness, unkindness or impatience.

And, O God, while you are Jesus my patient, deign also to be to me a patient Jesus, bearing with my faults, looking only to my intention, which is to love and serve you in the person of each one of your sick.

Lord, increase my Faith, bless my efforts and work, now and forevermore. Amen