

## Seeing

One of the most beautiful days of my ministry here at St Elizabeth's was a meeting with some preschoolers who wanted to know what it's like to be houseless.

Kelly, a native Hawaiian from Maui, of royal ancestry, has been living on the streets for more years than he can remember.

And he was gracious enough to meet with these preschoolers, to answer their questions, to put a human face on what is too often simply a social stigma.

It was beautiful to hear the children ask their questions, earnestly and respectfully.

Where do you eat?

Where do you sleep?

Are you sometimes afraid?

How did you lose your house?

And, just as beautifully, Kelly answered as honestly and humbly as he could.

About a month later, they gave Kelly a folder with hand drawn pictures and kind letters.

He told me those were some of the most special gifts he's ever received.

What happened in that encounter between Kelly and the children?

The children, saw him.

As a human being.

And the mystery and fear that so often surrounds those who are different from us, melted away.

So that hopefully, when these children run across a houseless person on the street, they'll see the person, the fellow human being, and not an object to be ignored or ridiculed.

I was thinking about Kelly's time with those preschoolers this week because of what's happening on the national stage.

As Governors from two of our most populous states are bussing and flying perfectly legal migrants, who are here seeking refugee status pursuant to law, to towns and communities far away.

Engaging in no coordination with those towns or communities.

And, reportedly inducing these migrants to take those trips by lying about housing and employment opportunities if they go.

When challenged about this unconscionable conduct, these leaders laugh and justify and double down.

Unlike the preschoolers, they don't see the "other" as a human being.

They simply see opportunity for advancement in an increasingly racist political culture.

So it's no surprise that the Holy Spirit puts before us today the parable of Lazarus and the rich man.

Which is NOT a story about the afterlife!

Scholars remind us that the story Jesus tells today is based on a commonly known folktale from that time.

A folk tale much like Charles Dickens "A Christmas Carol."

A Christmas Carol's about a rich man who cannot see other people, until he's dragged through an otherworldly encounter, that changes who he is, and how he acts, in the here and now.

Just so, today's parable isn't about the afterlife.

It's about making changes in this life — so that we can experience the life that truly is life.

Of course, there's a big difference between Scrooge and the rich man in the parable.

Scrooge, at long last, gets the message, and changes!

While the rich man seems to keep missing every chance to turn around.

He's stuck!

And that stuckness is a testament to the power of money — and social position.

It's a testament to the power of the sense of entitlement that those who have -- deserve what they have.

It is a testament to how power and position and money can blind us to who we really are; and to who we are meant to become.

So while Scrooge eventually comes around and happily opens his eyes and his wallet (in THAT order!) to people he once despised -- people he now sees as his brothers and sisters, the rich man in the parable isn't so astute.

Even though he calls Abraham "father" and sees Lazarus snuggling into Abraham's bosom, he still doesn't make the connection that since he and Lazarus are children of the same father, they are also, and have always been, brothers.

He doesn't make the connection when Lazarus starved outside his gate.

And he doesn't make the connection even now, in death.

Instead, he tells Abraham to turn Lazarus into a delivery boy -- "I'm thirsty!"

Because Lazarus serving this rich man?

That's the way of the world!

Our Jewish siblings believe that even sinners in hell can repent, and when they do, Abraham himself goes into hell and brings them into paradise.

But before that can happen, they need to see.

Because the flames aren't to punish, but to open our eyes.

Sadly, the rich man isn't there yet.

And the class on change won't be cut short, even if he's dying of thirst.

And maybe, like Scrooge, he will eventually come to see that life is intended to be lived with generosity and humor.

That the bounty of this world is the gift of God for the people of God.

But, he's not there yet.

Since his Plan A doesn't work (issuing commands), he quickly moves to Plan B: begging!

Begging on behalf of his social equals.

His equally tight wadded, privileged brothers!

For Abraham, this new plan to save his brothers is a non-starter.

They have the Scriptures, which overflows with commands that we have mercy on the poor, on the illegal immigrant, whether or not in our eyes they're deserving.

This is the way and the wisdom of God.

But the rich man remains clueless.

And so he insists that the wisdom of God isn't wise enough.

And then he comes up with Plan C!

Send someone back from the dead!

In fact, since Lazarus won't be busy bringing me some water, send HIM back to my brothers!

That'll do the trick!

And here's where the irony of Jesus' wonderful story is especially sweet.

All this time, the rich man is dealing with two dead guys, Abraham and Lazarus.

And none these dealings with the dead move him an inch from his conviction that the world runs on money, power and prestige!

If a face to face meeting with the dead can't open the now dead rich man's eyes, what chance will it have to open his brothers' still living eyes?

At the end of the story, we're left wondering whether the rich man like Scrooge, will find life.

Scrooge gets the message.

He sees, at long last, those in need.

Will the rich man do the same?

Will he allow the life that Paul writes so eloquently about, will he let that life in?

For what Paul discovers -- after his own rude awakening to the ways of God -- is that selfless giving places us squarely in the river of creation.

A creation that starts as Nothing, only to become, Everything.

In the act of selfless giving, we find harmony with the Mystery we call God.

We step into the flow of creation that carries us in her currents to places more magnificent than we can ever imagine.

We find the narrow door that leads to the Kingdom of God.

But to get there, we, especially the privileged among us, which in 21st century America means especially educated white men like me, we must learn how to see.

"Your viewpoint is determined by your standpoint," my cousin Eddie likes to say.

He's right.

And to develop the ability to see those who were previously invisible to me, I have to change where I stand.

I have to stand in the shoes of "the other."

And I have to, on a daily basis, remember to make that effort.

And when I do, that is when the kingdom that turns the world's expectations and judgments and certainties upside down, opens its arms.

Which is what Paul says to Timothy today:

“Tell those who are rich in this world’s wealth to quit being so full of themselves and so obsessed with money, which is here today and gone tomorrow.

Tell them to go after God, who piles on all the riches we could ever manage.

To do good.

To be rich in helping others.

To be, extravagantly generous!

If they do that, they’ll build a treasure that’ll last.

And they’ll discover the life that is — truly life!” 1Tim 6:19, The Message TR.

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