

Pentecost 16 Proper 21 – Year C – Track 2 - 9-29-2019

Mind the gap. Mind the gap. In full disclosure, that was the “title” of one of the sermons I read based on today’s readings – and I “swiped” that phrase, because I think it directs us to the overriding theme of all of our readings today.

“Between you and us a great chasm has been fixed...” says Father Abraham in today’s parable – but who *fixed* the great chasm? Who made the gap? --- We do it ourselves, folks. We do it ourselves.

In our first reading from the prophet Amos, we hear the dire warnings. “Alas for those who are at ease in Zion, and for those who feel secure on Mount Samaria.” Zion is the southern kingdom, and Samaria is the northern kingdom. And remember that all these kingdoms had started out as the 12 tribes of Israel – Israel being “Jacob” and the 12 tribes being his 12 sons. But why the “Alas!”?

Alas for those who lie on beds of ivory,  
and lounge on their couches,  
and eat lambs from the flock,  
and calves from the stall;  
who sing idle songs to the sound of the harp,  
and like David improvise on instruments of music;  
who drink wine from bowls,  
and anoint themselves with the finest oils,  
***but are not grieved over the ruin of Joseph!***

Alas for those – from the north *and* the south – who are not grieved over the ruin of Joseph – Joseph, the beloved son of Jacob, sold into slavery – and here being the poor members of the people of Israel who were struggling in both kingdoms.

And Amos continues with the punch line: “Therefore they shall now be the first to go into exile.” Exile – the state of being barred from one’s native country, says the dictionary. They shall be the first to be separated from their homeland. They shall be the first to be *separated from themselves*. – They would be *exiled – separated from their true self* – because they had failed to notice the ruin of their brother Joseph – the *need* of the poor among them. They had exiled *themselves* because they had already *left* their native country – they had already left the kingdom of God – they had already stepped outside the *way of God* by the way they were living – comfortable themselves, but oblivious to the needs of those around them, oblivious to the concerns of God.

If we needed reminding about what those concerns of God are, we have them laid out in today’s psalm:

[The Lord] gives justice to those who are oppressed, \*  
and food to those who hunger.

7 The LORD sets the prisoners free;  
the LORD opens the eyes of the blind; \*  
the LORD lifts up those who are bowed down;

8 The LORD loves the righteous;  
the LORD cares for the stranger; \*  
he sustains the orphan and widow,  
but frustrates the way of the wicked.

*These* are the concerns of God. And living out of *these* concerns is, as Paul tells Timothy, the way to “take hold of the life that really *is* life.”

That is what Jesus is consistently trying to tell us – how to take hold of the life that really *is* life. And so we turn to today’s Gospel, and the question of what this all has to say to us today.

The first question that should strike us is *why* does the rich man not pay attention to this poor man at his gate?

Susanna Metz, a professor at Sewanee’s School of Theology, reminds us, “In Jesus’ day, the assumption was that a man like Lazarus was that way because of his or his parents’ sin. In our day, isn’t the assumption often that a person in Lazarus’ condition, the homeless, the poor, the down and out, are that way because of their “sin” of laziness or poor judgment or that they’re scamming us?”<sup>1</sup>

We, like the rich man, perhaps do not respond to “the needy” because we don’t judge them worthy. We have worked hard for what we have, and they are where they are because of how *they* have lived. Ah... there it is again. “We” and “them.” Mind the gap.

Rector Kirk Kubicek has this to say: “But if I think I earned all these boots and underwear and food, that I deserve it all, that it is mine to do with as I please, then, says Jesus and 1st Timothy and Amos, I am poor indeed. I am living in exile; in exile, far, far away from my sisters and brothers who are in real need. In exile, far, far away from all the brothers and sisters and children and grandchildren of Lazarus throughout the ages for whom our God has a special love and concern. It is like the Scripture says: there is a deep gap between us. And the economists and the newspapers and your own experiences and your own eyes will tell you that the gap is getting deeper and deeper every day.”<sup>2</sup>

Mind the gap.

I believe that the most dangerous phenomenon happening in our time is division. *Making* gaps. Building walls instead of bridges. Speaking to divide instead of unify. Rhetoric designed to make people feel they belong to something great, only so they can castigate, vilify, and denigrate those who do *not* belong. Making gaps – between *them* and *us*. Whether about ideas or cultures or nationalities or religions or the distribution of wealth and resources, beware of that which pits one group against another, beware of that which says “either/or” and instead hold onto “both/and.”

The gaps we create separate us – from one another, from the way of God. The gaps we create – when we keep others outside the gates of our lives – *exile* us. If nothing else, let us at least *notice* the gaps – the gulfs – those created by our culture, and those of our own making.

Anthony Clavier summarizes it this way: “What are we to *learn* from Jesus’s story? Beware of gulfs. Beware of being so impressed with your own views, your own possessions, your own intelligence, that you can’t be reached by love and in particular, God’s love. Be careful about that sort of self-justification that thoroughly separates us from God and each other, so that another or others become invisible and in your eyes, die.”<sup>3</sup>

Jesus’s parable is not about what will happen when we die. It is about what happens here – where we live, now. Let us not exile ourselves from who we truly are. Let us not create a great chasm between ourselves and the way of God. Let us mind the gap – and then *fill* the gap by choosing day after day to live the baptismal covenant we profess: to seek and serve Christ in *all* persons, to strive for justice and peace among all people, and to respect the dignity of every human being.

Amen.

[Amos 6:1a,4-7](#)

[Psalm 146](#)

[1 Timothy 6:6-19](#)

[Luke 16:19-31](#)

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<sup>1</sup> [Susanna E. Metz](https://www.episcopalchurch.org/library/sermon/many-ways-share-proper-21-c-2013) <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/library/sermon/many-ways-share-proper-21-c-2013>

<sup>2</sup> [Kirk Alan Kubicek](https://www.episcopalchurch.org/library/sermon/mind-gap-proper-21-c-2004) <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/library/sermon/mind-gap-proper-21-c-2004>

<sup>3</sup> [Anthony F.M. Clavier](https://www.episcopalchurch.org/library/sermon/what-separates-us-each-other-and-god-proper-21-c-2016) <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/library/sermon/what-separates-us-each-other-and-god-proper-21-c-2016>