



Grain

“The combination of economic inequality and economic segregation is deadly. It reinforces the advantages of those at the top while exacerbating and perpetuating the disadvantages of those at the bottom. Taken together, they shape not just inequality of economic resource, but also a more permanent and dysfunctional inequality of opportunity.” –Richard Florida, “The New Urban Crisis”

Field

¹⁹“There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. ²⁰And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, ²¹who longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man’s table; even the dogs would come and lick his sores. ²²The poor man died and was carried away by the angels to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried. ²³In Hades, where he was being tormented, he looked up and saw Abraham far away with Lazarus by his side. ²⁴He 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.’ ²⁵But 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. ²⁶Besides 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.’ ²⁷He said, ‘Then, father, I beg you to send him to my father’s house— ²⁸for I have five brothers—that he may warn them, so that they will not also come into this place of torment.’ ²⁹Abraham replied, ‘They have Moses and the prophets; they should listen to them.’ ³⁰He said, ‘No, father Abraham; but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’ ³¹He 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.’” Luke 16:19-31

Thoughts

A chasm separated the rich man and Lazarus in the afterlife. The parable, of course, is not an actual account of history. Jesus told the story to point to the danger of repeatedly ignoring certain individuals in our lives and/or of joining in with spoken and unspoken societal norms that render various groups of people invisible. Divisions based on economics and class, which many but not all people view as one, tear at the unity of God’s family and the fullness of life in community.

The story about Lazarus brings to mind settings in which people are present with or ignore one another. There are families and other groups in which people are chronically not present to one another; they’re together but not together, as though an invisible chasm separates the individuals. Mutual sympathy helps. Not pitying but being affected by the same feeling as another is the Greek Biblical meaning of sympathy, which is closer to how we use empathy. We are drawn to people who empathize.

Institutionalized chasms call upon greater empathy from us because of direct and subtle societal permission, even pressure, to divide into our own economic groups. When I attend high school reunions, some of us talk about how non- cliquish our class was and the way in which students of all economic backgrounds intermingled. If we divided more deeply over economics, whom would we have missed out on befriending in school? Though not all classes or high schools would have provided the same experience, it seems that according to research, economic chasms have widened. Empathy on a personal and advocacy level seems even more urgent.

What are chasms based primarily on class and money have you experienced? What do people miss out on as a result? May we experience the grace of repentance and forgiveness in this life. May God make us instruments of narrowing chasms that prevent the wellbeing of our communities. Happy Monday!

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Many blessings upon you,

Pastor Cindy