

Father Brad Neely

Spps, Nezperce: Sep 26, 2010

26th Sunday Ordinary Time, Cycle C

Amos 6: 1a, 4-7; 1Tim 6: 11-16; Lk 16: 19-31

Today's is one fascinating Gospel passage. When one considers hell, it is hard to say what it is like, exactly, other than there **is** such a thing as hell, and it is not a place we want to spend eternity. This passage is interesting for me to consider today, because as Deacon Don and I were driving last weekend to or from Nezperce, he posed the question---
?what if part of hell is being able to see what is going on in heaven, and knowing that you can never be a part of it. Along with the suffering--- you even observe personally in hell what the absence of God is like.

At the very least, this Gospel passage does flip us into a different mode of thinking. As typically happens in the Gospel of Luke, there is a *reversal* of *expectations*. The rich man *expects* to continue forever on easy street. And without giving it too much thought or attention, the rich man also *expects* the poor man to continue along in poverty. But does either *expectation* consider **eternity**?

The earthly rich man lands in hell, and the earthly poor man gains heaven. Where one spends eternal life is not necessarily linked to being rich OR poor. It is about our human response to the revelation of God, whatever our status in life. Even with the hardships and distractions that come from being poor, the poor man in the Gospel had the desire *to listen*, and had the *ears to hear* the things of God--- and to respond appropriately. The rich man, living very comfortably, perhaps went about his life with distraction from pleasures, to the exclusion of his spiritual life.

This past week in the daily readings, we heard from the Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament.

The author of the Book of Proverbs, says:

“[two things] *not to*[deny] *me before I die: Put falsehood and lying far from me, give me neither poverty nor riches; provide me only with the food I need; Lest, being full, I deny you, saying, "Who is the LORD?" Or, being in want, I steal, and profane the name of my God.” [Prov 30: 5-9]*

The author here wants to possess the **right measure** in going to his judgement at the time of his death.

He is saying, in an indirect way, that he trusts God to provide what is sufficient. It is he, the human man, who could deviate from God's **proper measure** by the use of his own human freedom.

What is God's **proper measure**?

God **has** already provided our knowledge of this.

The rich man in the Gospel sees Lazarus and Abraham across the impenetrable abyss between heaven and hell, and pleads with Abraham to warn the family he left behind what could be in store for them if they do not change their ways. But Abraham tells him that his family already **has** Moses and the prophets to guide them. The rich man then says that a dead man telling them would have a greater effect--- but Abraham assures them that if Moses and the prophets do not convince them, neither will a dead man.

The fullness of the knowledge that God has given us, [of the **proper measure for our souls** at the time of our death], came with the death of his own Son--- or should we say, His Son's resurrection. Unlike the rich man in the Gospel, **we** live in the era after this dead Son has risen from the dead. While the Son of God rising from human death

is completely sufficient to convince us of eternal life,
and how we might want to spend it,
there are still many in the world
unconvinced or unconcerned to listen.

We can't control other people's lives,
but the example of our own response
to the revelation of God
can't but help instill that desire within others.

So, no matter what our state in life:

*we can **listen** to the voice of God
as revealed through his servants,
such as Moses, the prophets,
and most fully, of course, Christ.

*we can put what we **hear** into **practice**.

*we can **understand**
that how life is lived here on earth
determines how we will **spend eternity**.

*we can **live**,
keeping **one eye** on the next life.

This leads us to another daily reading this past week,
on the Feast of the Apostle Matthew.
It is a selection from St. Paul's letter
to the Ephesians.

St. Paul pleads with them:

*"Brothers and sisters:
I, a prisoner for the Lord,
urge you to live in a manner worthy
of the call you have received. . ."* (Eph 4)

What call is Paul referring to?

The call, Paul says, is

*"one Lord, one faith, one baptism;
one God and Father of all,
who is over all and through all and in all."*

The response to this call **is to**
live in a manner worthy of it.

We lend our ears to **hear** what we need to hear,
and understand what we have been given
what is sufficient for attaining eternal life.

We realize that we are all going to live forever---
*it is only a matter of **where** we live forever.*

Jesus makes possible,
and invites us,
that this living forever be with Him,

So Paul's plea in today's scripture,
from his first letter to Timothy,
fits like a glove:

*"Compete well for the faith.
Lay hold of eternal life,
to which you were called. . . ."*

To compete well here
is not a competition with other people.
It is the competition between
our proper response to Christ's invitation---
living in a manner worthy of the call we have received--
-
and all the things that might lead us away
from this proper response.