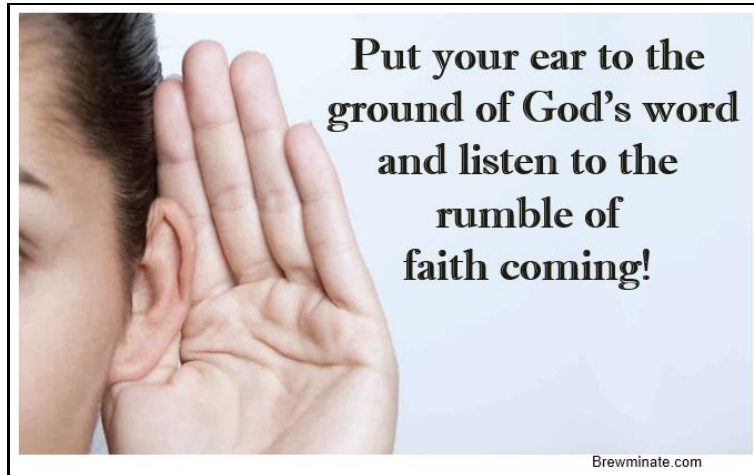


LISTEN TO GOD



Scripture:

Psalm 146

¹Praise the LORD! Praise the LORD, O my soul! ²I will praise the LORD as long as I live; I will sing praises to my God all my life long.

³Do not put your trust in princes, in mortals, in whom there is no help. ⁴When their breath departs, they return to the earth; on that very day their plans perish.

⁵Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD their God, ⁶who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them; who keeps faith forever; ⁷who executes justice for the oppressed; who gives food to the hungry.

The LORD sets the prisoners free; ⁸the LORD opens the eyes of the blind. The LORD lifts up those who are bowed down; the LORD loves the righteous. ⁹The LORD watches over the strangers; he upholds the orphan and the widow, but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.

¹⁰The LORD will reign forever, your God, O Zion, for all generations. Praise the LORD!

Luke 16:19-31

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.’³⁰ He said, ‘No, father Abraham; but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’³¹ He 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.’”

This is the Word of the Lord! Thanks be to God!



LISTEN TO GOD

The parables told by Jesus were intended to give the listeners a glimpse at life in the kingdom of God, a life where all are treated equally, no violence, no guns, no hunger, no sickness. Economic and social justice is done, and generous sharing and caring is a way of life. Some have called the parables earthly stories with a heavenly meaning. They reveal the heart of God.

LESSONS IN EXTREMES TO EMPHASIZE A POINT

A traditional way for a Rabbi to teach in those days was to tell stories and teach lessons in extremes to emphasize a point. For example, the parable of the mustard seed calls the mustard seed the smallest of all the seeds that becomes the greatest of all shrubs. We know that there are seeds on earth smaller than mustard seeds and there are shrubs larger than mustard plants. So, the lesson is given in extremes to get the attention of the listener.

A parable is like a metaphor explained in story form.

Jesus wanted people to see poor Lazarus as being in a terrible starving and suffering condition, where all he had were dogs to lick his wounds. Lazarus represented all the poor and helpless in the time of Jesus. And the rich

man was to be seen as the extreme opposite. He had fine clothing and ate sumptuous feasts daily, and he probably didn't even notice Lazarus as he traveled past him on a daily basis.

We all tend to stay away from situations and people we don't understand. Many of us are like the rich man who avoided all contact with Lazarus. But I would like to think the dogs licking his wounds were his friends. They were trying to heal him.

POVERTY

When one is not born in poverty or ever experienced what it is like to live month to month not knowing if you can keep the lights on, it is difficult to understand what a trap it is. Being below the poverty line is a huge blow to the self-esteem and it deeply affects psychological stability day by day. It feels like a hopeless tunnel that has no light at the end. Those born into poverty will likely die in poverty unless someone reaches into their life to give them hope, role-model another way of living and give a hand up out of their trapped situation.

Picture it: you need to feed your family, travel to and from work, and get your child school supplies. But you only have \$1.90 in your pocket. It seems like an impossible scenario. But for approximately eight-hundred million people in the world, it's their reality. Eleven percent of the world's population is living in extreme poverty, which is defined as surviving on only \$1.90 a day. Can we do something about this?

THE CAUSES OF POVERTY

To help people not fall into extreme poverty, we must first understand its causes. Here, are the top nine causes of poverty around the world. One is linked to the other.

1. **INADEQUATE ACCESS TO CLEAN WATER AND NUTRITIOUS FOOD.**

2. **LITTLE OR NO ACCESS TO LIVELIHOODS OR JOBS:** (Stuck, can't move.) Inconsistent work and low paying jobs can land a family in poverty. Land once farmed for food is taken over by corporations or caught up in war zones.

3. **CONFLICT:** Violence that we see in places like Syria can grind society to a halt, destroy infrastructure, and cause people to flee, forcing families to leave behind all their assets. In Syria, around seventy percent of the entire population lives below the poverty line. This was a country where extreme poverty was very rare before the war.

4. **INEQUALITY:** No matter what kind of inequality, it generally means the same thing: unequal or no access to the resources needed to lift a family out of poverty.

5. **POOR EDUCATION:** UNESCO estimates that one-hundred seventy-one million people could be lifted out of extreme poverty if they received just basic reading skills. Too many never learn to read. With even more education, world poverty can be cut *in half*.

6. **CLIMATE CHANGE:** The World Bank estimates that climate change has the power to push more than one-hundred-million people into poverty over the next ten years.

7. **LIMITED CAPACITY OF THE GOVERNMENT:** Many people living in the United States benefit from social welfare programs that people can access if they need healthcare or food assistance. Many countries have no ability to provide such programs. The poor are unable to access healthcare.

8. **LACK OF RESERVES:** People living in poverty don't have the means to weather the storms of life. So, when there is an illness and the bread winner can't work, there is not enough money to keep the family out of poverty.

9. **POOR INFRASTRUCTURE:** From roads, bridges, and wells to cables for light, cell phones, and internet — when the infrastructure suffers the people suffer and communities become isolated, water becomes contaminated, utilities fail.

Around the United States we see infrastructures failing and causing places of poverty to get even worse. When I worked in Prince George's county MD, I was amazed at all the potholes in the streets driving out to the poor parts of town compared to the streets where I lived in Potomac. The poor parts of the state just get worse out of neglect. They pay less taxes, so they get less attention from the government.

DAVID BROOKS' SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

David Brooks is a conservative columnist for the New York Times. He wrote a new book about a spiritual awakening he recently went through. In the book he identified the lies that our culture tells that show we are in a state of "Spiritual Sickness." He describes five lies our culture tells that show how sick we all are from living in our society. The fifth lie he describes is the lie that rich and successful people are worth more than poor and less successful people.

That fifth lie about the rich being worth more than the poor is a lie that has been told since Jesus' day and the issue Jesus is raising in our parable for today.

Our culture values the strong, the beautiful, the athlete, the talented, the rich, the famous, and devalues the disabled, the different, the less successful in business and the poor. Look at the way our culture pays our entertainers and athletes versus the salary for our police officers, nurses, and teachers. That shows what our culture values.

But Jesus valued Lazarus enough to name him in his parable. The name Lazarus means God is my help. Jesus assigned him to a place of heavenly comfort since he suffered so much in his time on earth. The rich man was literally unreachable in life and unreachable in death. He created his own chasm out of luxuries and self-centered ways. He didn't even realize Lazarus was suffering or he didn't care.

So, the rich man pleads to be given a chance to warn his family members before it is too late for them. But the answer for them is not to be given a miracle to listen to, but to listen to what God has already instructed them through the words of Moses and the prophets.

LISTEN TO GOD

Let's listen to God speaking to us through the voices of these children speaking God's word who are being lifted out of poverty by child sponsorship through Compassion.

The congregation was shown a video:
<https://www.compassion.com/poverty/what-the-bible-says-about-poverty.htm>

Listen to God who tells us clearly in this parable that we must not turn away from those in need or if we do there may be great consequences for our own eternity. We must be willing to see them as friends and do what we can to advocate for them. God wants us to see, to care for and to love those in need.

The misfortune of others could easily be our own. Life is short. Eternal life is eternal. When the suffering is ignored, we all suffer.

Prayer: Dear God, open our eyes to those all around us and especially to those in need, that we may see everyone everywhere as your beloved children. Amen.

BENEDICTION:

Our Deacons are great role-models for how to listen to God and how to show God's love to those in need.

Now is your chance to get to know your Deacons and be friends with a circle of Buddies.

May the Lord bless you and keep you, may the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you. May the Lord lift his countenance upon you and give you peace. Amen



**The Rev. Dr. Cindy Alloway
Presbyterian Church of the Roses
2500 Patio Court
Santa Rosa, CA 95405**