

Grace and peace from God our father and our Lord, Jesus Christ.

People in need find their way to the Church's doors as a matter of course. It's one of the constants of life as a pastor or life in the church for that matter. The other seeming constant is that they seem to find their way to the church on your day off when you happen to be at church for a moment to check your mail or when you're in the middle of something.

On Friday Stefanie asked me to grill for Fourth Friday Fellowship. Rob was scheduled to be grill master, but he had just come down with the same nasty cold that kept Stef home from work on Wednesday. I was going to be there anyway to support the fellowship ministry, so I had no problem coming a little early to grill.

About the time I'd gotten the grill ready and heated up, Stefanie came to me and said, *"There's a man outside who wants to see the pastor; he says you've helped him before. He's been there for a while even though I told him it was your day off, and he's still waiting. What should I tell him?"*

Frustrated that I'd been cornered on my day off yet again, I said, *"It's my day off. Tell him the pastor is not here . . . Tell him I'm in the middle of something, and when I have time I'll talk to him."* The burgers weren't going to get grilled on time all by themselves, and we were on a time line.

So, I put the matter out of my mind, and set to grilling. An hour later after 40 burgers had been grilled, I went through the narthex towards the bathroom, and someone – I think it was Gayle Halmo – informed me that a man was outside waiting to see me. Reminded, I went to the door.

He introduced himself, and said I'd helped him with a prescription two years ago, and did I recall? I vaguely remembered going to the Rite Aid with someone, so I said I remembered, and, *"How can I help today?"*

"Well I need another prescription filled because three guys beat me up last week and stole everything I had – my money, my phone, and my ID. But the lady gave me money for the prescription and even asked me to have dinner with you all."

"Well, we're glad you've come." He was looking for a secure place to put his bike, so we took it into the office lobby. *"Go find a good seat; there's movie afterwards. Dinner will start in a few minutes."*

I went back to finish my dinner preparations, and smiled, thinking, *"Thank you, Lord, for making me pastor of such wonderful people. I acted like the rich man today – too busy to care – but one of you people walked the walk and trusted you. She saw a need, she had the means to help, and she provided Lazarus with what he needed. More than that she demonstrated love through hospitality and kindness."*

It's awfully easy to become the rich man, so preoccupied with our own concerns that we neglect the concerns of the Lord. Jesus' parable if it comes to any conclusion is that the poor are of special concern to God because they are so often neglected by the world. It's not that God loves the poor more than the rest; it's that God recognizes the inconsistency in resources, and so needs to pay greater attention to the poor because we so often don't.

This is why those people who come to the church doors for help

represent a kind of trust that Lazarus displayed in life. Lazarus lived trusting only in God's willingness to care for him through his people's observance of the law, and so people like the rich man were obligated to give alms. Unfortunately, did so not out of concern for Lazarus and his fellows among the poor, but because by fulfilling the law and giving alms they were feathering their own heavenly nest in the bosom of Abraham – so they think. But in reality, they rely on themselves, their wealth, their knowledge and their perceived obedience to the law as the what will take care of them.

Lazarus on the other hand relies solely on God.

Our brothers and sisters who come in need are there to remind us of faithful living by trusting in God's willingness to show mercy, though us. Those who come to us expecting to see God's mercy for the poor also present us with the opportunity to both exercise God's mercy as agents of the Kingdom of God and to live in deeper gratitude. Gratitude comes when we realize the many blessing we have been given, but also when we experience the joy of having been given the chance to help another.

The good news is simply this: Jesus died and rose for us – not me – us. That good news is **present even in a gospel reading about the rich and the poor**, clean and unclean, proud and humble.

It is present in the Old Testament prophet Amos who calls Israel to remember the justice and mercy of God's kingdom, while reminding God's people of the havoc we wreak when we live comfortable, complacent lives.

It is **present in our epistle reading** which calls us *to be wary of the*

*danger of being seduced into trusting in our prosperity, while **it invites us to live the life that is life by trusting that God will provide what we need – even to address the needs of our neighbor.***

In Jesus' parable the rich man asks that Lazarus be allowed to return to the living so that his 5 brothers might be spared the agony that he experiences in Hades. Jesus tells them, *"They have Moses and the prophets; they should listen to them. If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead."*

We my brothers and sister also have Moses and the prophets, and John the Baptist, Jesus who has risen from the dead, and the poor at our doorstep. We should listen to them.

Let us heed Paul's advice to Timothy:

As for those who are in the present age rich, command them not to be haughty, or to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but rather on God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous and ready to share ... so that they may take hold of the life that really is life.

AMEN !!!