

[\[Link to audio recording.\]](#)

Okay, so you know that there are some weeks where our readings don't have a super clear through line or theme or maybe there are a whole bunch of different things happening...but that's not today. Today, the message is clear: wealth, unchecked and hoarded, will not lead to happiness, life, or wholeness. Not of self, not in relationship with others, and not in relationship with God.

The prophet Amos doesn't mince words, holding up a mirror to all the ways the people of Israel reveled in their food, wine, and resources while the poor, the widows, the orphans, the stranger, are left out in the cold.

In the second reading, the letter to Timothy, Timothy is reminded that in his baptismal promises, he is committed to advocating for those who are oppressed. He is also encouraged to remind *others* who have riches that their true wealth is in their life of faith, in the blessings they have received from God and in the things they share with others and use for the work of God's reign.

And, of course, there is once again a parable from Jesus, this time about a rich man and a poor man named Lazarus, who is covered in sores and who longs for even a tiny bit of food that might fall from the rich man's table. Instead, he dies and, while he is carried away by angels to be with Abraham, the rich man also dies and is sent to Hades where he is in terrible torment.

The rich man asks Abraham to send Lazarus to his brothers to warn them and Abraham's response makes a good point: you and your brothers have already had all the law and the prophets, you've already had God's Word, why would they listen if someone came to them from the dead?

I feel like we can hear Jesus speaking directly to all of us—the listeners then and each of us now—saying basically the same thing: you have been told, through scripture, through the words of the prophets, living and dead, that the love and idolization of wealth is a path of death.

And it's not a path of death because God makes it so, but rather because when money, when wealth, when power becomes the ultimate goal, we lose relationships, we lose love, we lose compassion, we lose all the parts of life that make life worth living.

This juxtaposition of wealth and power against deprivation and oppression was especially on display the past week. We witnessed one of the most opulent funerals, probably of our lifetime, filled with pageantry and pomp and just massive amounts of money spent. We also continue to hear stories from around the world that highlight those wealth inequities. Pakistan still has huge swaths of land underwater. Hurricane Fiona hit Puerto Rico, causing

devastation of homes, businesses, and crops. In our own backyard, we hear stories of how rising prices continue to squeeze wallets and force families to make impossible decisions.

I don't have super strong feelings one way or the other about Queen Elizabeth II, or about the English monarchy in general. I do, however, have strong feelings about well-done liturgy, and so I watched several clips over the past few days of the service, wanting to hear the music, the homily, the prayers.

And you know what? Strip away the trappings of royalty, of wealth, of power, of status...the service itself, at its core, was almost identical to the service I would officiate for any one of you at the time of your death, or, since I hope not to do any of your funerals any time soon, identical to any number of services I've done in my years of ministry.

The words of scripture are the same. The prayers are the same. The hope that those who loved and now mourn this great monarch need to hear is the same hope that every grieving person of faith has to hold on to.

The gospel reading that Queen Elizabeth selected for her service? John 14:1-9a. The passage where Jesus reminds us that there are many dwelling places prepared for us and that Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Easily two-thirds of the funerals I've done have featured this reading. Not because it's required, but because it means deep and abiding comfort to people in pain.

I mention this because it's worth repeating: when it comes to our who we are at our core, our deepest and truest identity is a beloved child of God.

No matter our title, how much money we have in the bank, the size of our house, the amount of food in our pantry—no matter any of it, we are God's children, not any better or worse, not any higher or lower. We all make up the body of Christ. When one part is hurting or deprived or weakened, it doesn't matter how well others are doing, the whole body is.

So, what does that mean for how we live?

It means that any way of thinking that is "us-them" or "me first" is antithetical to reign of God. We are called to look around and see who isn't currently at our table, look for who is sitting outside the gate, hoping for scraps—and we are not called to offer them scraps, but to invite them inside, care for them, and welcome them to a seat at the table.

It can be so tempting to focus merely on ourselves, to *only* make sure that we have what we need, even if it's at the expense of others. But when we do that, we ignore our siblings in Christ.

Even across two thousand years, the parable of Lazarus and Rich Man still has the same sense of urgency and irony. Like the Rich Man, *we* have heard, over and over again what God is calling us to do with the wealth and resources we have been made stewards of. And,

like the Rich Man, over and over again, we too often opt to secure power, privilege, and prosperity for ourselves, maybe tossing a proverbial bone to Lazarus, but never taking the real message to heart.

So today, we hear it again.

And today, we are reminded again of what Moses and the prophets have to tell us.

The challenge is, what are we going to do about it?

Will we strive to change the way we live, the way we think about our money, the way we treat others who have less?

Or will we nod attentively, then shrug our shoulders and turn back in ourselves?

The question is there. The urging of God is there.

What are we going to do?

Amen.