



Rich man, poor man, now and forever

We are all familiar with the parable in the Bible about the rich man and Lazarus who was so poor he was content to lie at the palace gate and eat whatever scraps that came his way. There are many Lazaruses today that hang out on street corners in hopes passers-by will take pity on them. Some do and toss a couple of bucks to the poor souls. Others ignore them and look the other way and wonder why “these people” don’t get a job instead of sponging off the rest of us. Are they going to be losers all their lives?

Why did God allow some people to be poor or sickly? Not too long ago, it was thought to be a punishment for the sins folks committed. In reality, though, some of us are less fortunate than others, not just with money, but also with talent, appearance, and intellect, just to name a few human characteristics that make us different from one another. It’s commonplace to ask, “Why do we need to share with



others what we have gained through our own efforts? Let them earn their own way.” Remember Lazarus? He was ill and he needed help but the rich man was too preoccupied with his fortunes to be bothered by such a lowly person.

Most of us, however, are not rich and we live on a budget, be it formally itemized or merely a stack of monthly bills. A large portion of the income of the average family is earmarked for those monthly expenses. It’s what we do with our discretionary income for which God will hold us accountable. What will be his reaction if we blew it all on excesses like designer clothes, plush automobiles or McMansions? We are constantly bombarded with ads and peer pressure to get those things we want but really don’t need because, “well, we deserve it, don’t we?” No, not if you are a good steward—that’s this sharing of time, talent and treasure we talk about so much.

Unlike in biblical times, we live in a democracy and through taxation we pool our resources for a variety of needs including easing the pain of the homeless as depicted in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. Today, welfare has become such a derogatory word that recipients are belittled by government and individuals alike if they receive just a minimum subsistence. If we are to take the lessons Jesus taught seriously, perhaps we should rethink the needs of the poor—you know, the people Jesus liked to hang out with.

Those in government are elected to look out for the welfare of all, not just special interests. Taxpayers have charged them with the responsibility to spend their money wisely and fairly, unlike the rich man in our fable who only thought of himself and those he hobnobbed with. The plight of people like Lazarus was not his responsibility, so he thought. But then the rich man died and he realized his

mistakes as he suffered eternal damnation. He called on Abraham to send someone from the world of the dead to warn his brothers of their omissions. But Abraham said if they do not listen to the living Word, they will not listen to someone who has risen from the dead. How wise. How many times do we ignore the true-life examples of the risen Christ.

Jesus was impressed with those who valued people and their personal relationships more than amassing wealth, power, prestige or honor. Jesus didn’t pursue any of these things. He did not want public acclaim. He wanted all people to grow in their respect and concern for one another. Call it charity, compassion, or love. It is what makes this life worth living and our eternal life in heaven possible whether we are rich or poor or anything in between.

Written by Ray Huss, member of our Stewardship Committee