



*What Business Are You In?*

*(First in the Advent sermon series)*

*Galatians 6:7-10 & Luke 16:19-31*

*First Sunday of Advent ~ December 2nd, 2018*

*First Federated Church of Peoria, Illinois*

*The Rev. Dr. Forrest Krummel, Jr.*

Text: *So let us not grow weary in doing what is right...* (v. 9a)

There was a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, full of sores, who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table..." so begins Jesus' parable.

A parable of two men. One who was known by everyone--the rich man, and the other known only to God - the poor man, Lazarus by name. The poor man could not help his poverty. And he didn't long for much in the cruel hand that Life dealt him. He merely longed for "the scraps that fell from the rich man's table", the leftovers, if you will. And the rich man, well, he was unaware of Lazarus. One gets the impression that he was self-consumed. He wasn't a bad man, per se, he was just conveniently oblivious to what lay outside his gate.

As what happens with all of us, both Lazarus and rich man died - on the same day. As they entered into that Reality that lies beyond this one, we are told, the rich man found himself in a place of eternal torment while Lazarus found himself nestled in the bosom of Father Abraham. Seeing Lazarus the rich man called out to Father Abraham. "Send Lazarus to dip his finger in cool water and bring it to me that I may quench my thirst for I am in torment." Even in death it seems that the rich man saw others as serving his needs. God replied that there was a chasm that divided the two realities, a chasm that could not be crossed. The rich man then pleaded for his father and brothers who still roamed the earth. Send word to them, he begged, "so that they can avoid my fate." "They have Moses and the prophets," Abraham replied. "But they won't listen to Moses and the prophets; but if someone should go to them from the dead, they will be convinced." "If they won't listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they listen to someone who came back from the dead."

The story of the rich man and Lazarus parallels Charles Dickens' novelette A Christmas Carol. Set on Christmas Eve we see Ebenezer Scrooge, a bitterly greedy old man. He is dismissive of his only nephew who invites him to have a bowl of holiday punch, sarcastic to two gentlemen asking for a donation to the poor and the needy and very grudgingly gives his clerk, Bob Cratchit, Christmas Day off. As he walks home on a foggy dark misty night he thinks that he hears strange noises - a coach roaring down the street, voices in the mist. These apparitions continue until he is in his bedchamber. There he settles down to a bowl of soup when suddenly the room comes alive. A service bell covered with cobwebs from years of lack of use rings wildly, and the face of Jacob Marley, his long deceased partner, appears on the mantle.

And then, it's Jacob Marley himself, or the shadow ghost of Marley. He drags heavy chains and metal money boxes as he rattles to a chair. "Speak comfort to me, Jacob." "I have none to give," Marley replied. Marley tells Scrooge that he wears - he drags to chains of his past decisions - those things that he should have done but failed to do. And, furthermore, Scrooge's chain longer and heavier for he has forged his links an extra seven years.

Not know what else to say, Scrooge tells Marley that he was always a "good man of business." At this comment the ghost shrieks and cries "Business! Mankind was my business. The common welfare was my business. The dealings of my trade were but a drop of water in the comprehensive ocean of my business."

The parable and the story got me to thinking, What business are you in? What business am I in? By business, I don't mean we earn a living, but why did God deign for any of us to be born? What Purpose do you think that God had in mind? After all, we are not an accident, no matter what anyone else may say or think. We are children of God, and therefore precious in the sight of God. We are the sum total of all of our ancestors. And we are unique. No one has ever had our set of abilities, experiences, or insights.

And while we are thinking about it, have you ever wondered what business First Federated Church is in? Why did God lead two dissimilar downtown congregations to come together - two congregations under one roof and governing board. One congregation was quite liberal, active in the abolitionist movement and boasted that the leading agnostic of the day, Robert Ingersoll, paid a pew rent each year. The other congregation was more conservative and maybe even reactionary. It took six different "building committees" to settle on the spot we are today. Then it was at the far edge of Peoria. Today it is in the city's "central" area. And here we are over 80 years later. What did God have in mind when God birthed us?

When the Westminster Divines wrote their longer and shorter catechism they began with "Why"; Why did God create us--each one of us, and why did God create First Federated Church? For what purpose? Their answer, "To glorify God and enjoy Him forever." We glorify God by observing Moses and the prophets, but most importantly, by taking Jesus seriously. The Risen Lord commissioned us to "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; teaching them to observe all that I commanded you. And lo, I am with you until the end of time." (Matthew 28)

In other words, "humanity" is our business. The least, the last, the lost, and the lonely are our business. "Whoever wishes to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for my sake and the Gospel's will save it," Jesus promised. We find purpose and meaning in life only in so far as we give ourselves away, to the glory of God. So let us not grow weary in doing what is right.