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Christ Lutheran Church
Sixteenth Sunday in Pentecost
September 25, 2022
Amos 6:1, 4-7; Ps. 146; I Timothy 6:6-19; Luke 16:19-31*

This week I wrote in my letter to the congregation in our Thursday email about Erin Carampot's and my experiences at the ReKindle gathering at Columbia Theological Seminary a couple weeks ago. I encourage you to read it if you haven't done so already, and today I want to tell you a story that we heard from one of the other congregations that was represented at the gathering.

The congregation, located in Columbia, South Carolina, is relatively brand new – it's only about 10 years old and associated with the Presbyterian Church, USA. The pastor and lay person who were present were young, and the particular outreach they have is to new, young Christians. So new, in fact, that some of them have no idea what a baptismal font is.

During the height of Covid, they, like us, put their offering plates up front for people to bring their offering forward so they wouldn't be passing plates and potentially passing germs. One Sunday, some new visitors were present in church, and when they came forward to put cash and checks in the offering plate, instead, not knowing what it was, they placed their offering in the baptismal font. The baptismal font full of water. So full that when the financial secretary found the money and checks, she first had to go get a hairdryer to blow it dry before she could count it.

Perhaps these new people didn't know what the baptismal font was, but I might argue that maybe they were actually putting their money in the right place. Because as people of faith, when we are baptized, all of who we are is baptized—our feelings, our vocations, our decisions, our relationships, and yes, even our money.

I wonder when the last time was that you thought about your baptism like that – that your baptism affects how you see, what you say, what you do, and how you make decisions, including your financial decisions? Perhaps it's easier to remember or admit the times that we have not allowed our

baptism to inform our ways of living, the times and decisions we have made that do not reflect our identity as a beloved child of God.

Now I don't know if the rich man in the parable we heard today from Luke 16 was baptized. Probably he wasn't even a real person, since this is a parable, a story Jesus used to illustrate a spiritual lesson. But it seems pretty clear that he did not live through a baptismal lens.

Every single day a poor man, Lazarus, laid outside his gate, waiting for the crumbs to fall from the rich man's table. It's interesting—the rich man knew Lazarus' name. When both the rich man and Lazarus were alive, the rich man likely passed by him every day, seeing or perhaps not seeing his sores and his hunger, stepping over him as he went through his gate. He knew enough about him to know his name, but not enough to care about him. He did not see Lazarus as one who had the same worth as he did, he did not share his wealth with him, he did not let God shape how he used his money to care for anyone outside himself.

When they both died, the rich man finally was faced with what he had done – he had created so large a chasm between himself in Hades and Lazarus in heaven that it couldn't be crossed. He had, as it says in I Timothy, wandered away from the faith and pierced himself with many pains. And instead of repenting, instead of realizing that he had not lived out his identity as God's child, as a child of Abraham, he still wanted Lazarus, the poor man, to help *him* – come cool my tongue for I am in agony, go warn my brothers so that they will not also come to this place of torment.

Even when what he had done was laid out before him, the rich man's love of money plunged him into ruin and destruction and continued to keep him from seeing and caring about anyone other than himself and, maybe you could argue, his brothers.

Now, I don't think the purpose of this parable is to scare us to think that we might be thrown into Hades—into hell—if we don't stop to give more than breadcrumbs to those who are not as financially well off as we are.

But I do think that Jesus told this parable to get us to question the lens we are living through. Does our lens only reflect back on ourselves, or does our lens affect how we care for one another, how we care for the poor, how we care for our church?

(font)

You know, when we were baptized, God gave us a new name—beloved child of God—and promised to care for us, restore us, give us wholeness, and grant us immeasurable grace. What God shows us in baptism is that when you know someone's name you care about them. Knowing someone's name means that you have a relationship with them, and we tend that relationship by sharing what we have and caring for their needs.

Baptism is not a one-time event. Baptism shapes us every day and gives us a new lens to see outside ourselves. A lens that even affects how we decide what we do with our money.

When you fill out your pledge card for 2023 in the next 2 weeks, I encourage you to do so through a baptismal lens. In your baptism, you are named beloved child of God, and God has promised to care for you. When you fill out your pledge card, you are caring for those with whom you have a relationship in this place.

Your pledge to Christ Lutheran Church is not a pledge toward the electricity bill or the maintenance of the building or staff salaries, it's a pledge to relationships, to those who are sitting around you today. You are pledging to shape our church to care for the spiritual and sometimes even the physical needs not only of yourself, but of your siblings in Christ.

Unlike the rich man had who knew Lazarus' name but was unwilling to share with him, I hope that when you make your pledge you think of and maybe even name aloud people whose names you know in this place, and that you realize that your pledge is helping care for their needs, as well as the needs of the community outside our doors and even around the world.

Just like those visitors at the church in South Carolina remind us, our wallets, our checkbooks, our bank accounts are dripping with baptismal water. When we see and share our money through a baptismal lens, we are building and caring for relationships – with God and with each other. And that is how, as Timothy says, we take hold of the life that really is life. Amen.