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 Proper 21C: Luke 16:19-31

I was stuck in some crazy traffic yesterday.

If today's readings were translated into traffic signs and symbols,
 they would be a flashing yellow light, caution ... slow down... warning.
 Shun temptation and be wary of loving money, the epistle reading says
 Listen to Moses and the prophets, Abraham admonishes.
 Woe to folks who feel comfortable and secure, Amos says.
 Pay attention. At-risk people may not other people.
 They might be you. They might be me. They are us.

But is that all there is for us today—scare tactics to be good and to listen?

As much as we don't know about the story from Luke—
 doesn't the rich man have a name, for goodness' sake?
 Is Lazarus mute?

At the same time, this text tells us a lot.
 The Romans only let royalty and folks with special permission could wear purple
 so the rich man wearing purple is not just a colorful detail
 but an indicator of socioeconomic status.

The dogs tell us something too.
 Now don't picture Stilton or Sonny or Maggie.
 Picture wild, roaming street dogs.
 So the fact that these animals, viewed with such contempt,
 then turn around lick Lazarus' sores,
 is viscerally disgusting on multiple levels.

So Lazarus dies, not entirely surprising, given his situation,
 and is carried off to be with Abraham.
 Now being with Abraham, sometimes called being in the bosom of Abraham,
 is considered a great honor in death, one of the highest places of bliss.

Enoch, one of the lesser well known patriarchs
from Genesis, goes there.
Elijah went there.

To go from being ignored at someone's gate
to Abraham's side is like the biggest and most total 180 conceivable.

Then the rich man dies too.

He does not go to Abraham's bosom, which to be fair, 99.9% of people do not.
We find out the rich man apparently does know Lazarus' name,
though it's hard to decide which is worse—
that he knew Lazarus' name and ignored him
or if he didn't see or notice him at all.

These requests don't seem all *that* outlandish—

I mean, what is Lazarus doing besides hanging out with Abraham?

But that misses part of the point.

The rich man seems to see himself as not only the main character
in his own story but also the main character in many people's
stories.

The rich man identifies Lazarus
as being someone available to do
his bidding.

For example:

`Then, father, **I** beg you to send him to **my** father's house--
for **I** have five brothers-- that he may warn them,

We seem to have this rich man's number—he is
egotistical, he is self-serving, he is not compassionate.

Ironically enough, Jesus excels at collapsing people into one dimension
in his parables to make a point.

In this story, for example, maybe the rich man and Lazarus remind us
of the action-consequence relationship, that there is one,

Even if it doesn't happen in this earthly life.
 Or maybe the point is we will not always have the chance
 to right some of the wrongs we do
 Jesus wants to get us to the point quickly.
 Jesus is many things,
 but he is not a novelist.

People in Jesus' parables are less people and more caricatures
to help us understand some kind of lesson.
 They're literary devices. And that's okay.
 What's become harder is that we've done this to people in real life.

People are more like the actual people in the Bible, less like the people in Bible's stories:
 The disciples, who took this awesome risk to follow Jesus
 And then ditched him in his time of need to save their own skins
 And then who chose to believe something very strange & wonderful.

People are like Paul,
 Who gave us some great passages like 1 Corinthians 13 on love
 and then one chapter later in the same book
 says women should stay silent in church.

People are like the man who told the British to come
 to Lexington and Concord since that is where all the munitions were being stored
 Being the same man who lovingly tended the grave
 of the only freed Black man in Concord's graveyard.
 It kept getting vandalized, so he would clean it up.

People are like me, who thinks large lots should have more than one house on them,
 And maybe houses that have not been cared for or maintained
 should be knocked down.
 I know for a fact that there are people I love in this parish,
 some I know about some I don't,
 who vehemently disagree with me. I know that.
 I hope you don't think that's
 the only thing someone needs to know about me.

We're complicated; we're confusing; we're brilliant; we're maddening;
we're compassionate; we are ignorant.

We are all mysteries, even to ourselves, let alone to one another.

We are not puzzles to be solved, or questions to be answered.

Neither is anyone else.

I want a world for Alice who we are about to baptize to be one
of love and understanding and nuance, for God's sake.

And what small one thing could we do to help change that?

What could our conversations at Thanksgiving, less than two months away, be like?

There are guides out there. I've used them for our Harvest Supper –
and other places.

What could you give a 15 minute talk about unprompted?

What's one of your favorite holidays foods and why?

They reveal our common humanity.

They speak across the divide.

What would our world look like if intentionally sought conversations
with people who thought differently than us about something?

This is hard, and time consuming, and this is risky.

We seem to be in uncharted territory in this regard,

and the great chasm referred to seems more present
than in many if not all of our memories.

We may not be able to close it. We can't, honestly.

We might be able to help make it less bad.

Amen.