# **Open to Life Here and Now - Peter’s talk Sunday 25th September 2022**

Based on Luke and 1 Timothy - The readings are below

Just as now, a favourite way of understanding what you are like now is to imagine what will happen when that individual dies

Hades, from the Greek, is a place of the dead. Sheol, in the Hebrew tradition, was also the residing place of the dead.

In this passage it is a place of torment and torture, seemingly for those who most deserved it by their behaviour in their first life.

Elsewhere in Luke it seems as if there is no waiting period before the eternal destiny. The thief on the cross goes to be, this day, with Jesus in Paradise.

Elsewhere in the NT we read about a judgement day, or the great day of the Lord, when all will face judgement. This is more about the transformation of the whole world and seems to be different to a focus on the fate of the individual.

This parable, or is it based on and expansion or extension by Jesus of a folk tale, deals with the afterlife of one person, an individual, rather than the holistic vision for a redeemed world.

What was the rich man’s crime? Was it being rich? He certainly was rich. He had a gate for Lazarus to sit by and a wall. He had a mansion to live in and protect. He wore purple. Tironian purple was a dye made from shellfish only found in one area of the Mediterranean. It was expensive and there was even a law at times that only royalty could wear purple. Thank goodness Robyn T did not live in those times.

In contrast we are given enough information about the poor man called Lazarus to indicate that he was in a pitiful state

* He was covered with sores – unhealed sores meant you could not mix in society
* He did not have any way of earning and lived on scraps in a world where everyone had some vocation, no matter how meagre
* The dogs licked his sores – he did not have the energy of any way to protect him from this.

BTW – Lazarus means, ironically ‘God has helped’. Maybe because no one else will

Countercultural- in those times the overriding belief was that if you were poor, sick or disabled, (or all 3) then there must have been sin involved.

The unnamed rich man had more opportunity to keep the health, dietary and social association commandments.

In this story, now the rich man is asking from his ‘hell not on earth’ to be helped by the poor man. He even shows some evidence of caring for others, but only the male members of his immediate family.

Jesus seems to be emphasising another part of the Law and the Prophets – that of showing compassion, even to those not related to you. The same message as the Parable of the Good Samaritan.

This parable speaks to us of the violence (or sin if you like to use that word) that comes from apathy. That apathy can be about

* the widening gap between rich and poor in the world. John spoke about his a few weeks ago.
* the pursuit of lifestyle at the expense of the natural environment
* the over-utilisation of our earth’s resources which neglects the future generations.
* The suffering in our midst in our locality or our country or across the world with violence at all levels from gender based oppression in the home to countries seeking territorial advantage through war.

Get over the view of ‘the deserving rich’. It is mostly by chance that our efforts (or not) in our work have made you one of the most advantaged in one of the most wealthy nations on earth in the wealthiest times in history.

In the 1 Timothy Ch 6 reading 6:8 invites us to a lifestyle which makes do with enough. There’s that word again. **Enough.** Both John A and Pam talked about that a few weeks ago. There is no need to busy oneself with more. Accumulation of wealth is the task of a lifetime and leaves little room for others and in a paradoxical sense for oneself and often those who need us most. So the Timothy and Luke passage about the rich and the poor man passages are addressing the practicalities of living and identifying the deception which we forge when we spend our lives accumulating more and more - far more than we need. The authors appear concerned primarily with self-destructive forces which bring ruin (6:9). Greed for money also plunges others into poverty and ruin

Experience of meeting, or living amongst people not like us help to reduce apathy and helps us engage with compassion. These real people in real situations become those who live amongst us and not just statistics. (Even though I love statistics, I have deliberately avoided using them, just as Jesus did.)

Heaven and hell may not be the point in this portion of the gospel, but life on Earth as we live it.

Following the way of God is discipline, is paying attention to the teaching handed down from our ancestors. That instruction, in both the Hebrew scriptures (the teaching to which Jesus refers) and New Testament, guides our living here and now — living without greed and selfishness. Living with integrity and care for others is like paddling upstream, it seems to be becoming more countercultural as the years go by or am I just getting older?

The reward and punishment image is a tool for instruction, showing consequences for the choice of path we take and encouraging us to take the path of life

# **Luke 16:19-31 New International Version (NIV)**

“There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores and longing to eat what fell from the rich man’s table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores.

“The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham’s side. The rich man also died and was buried. In Hades, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. So he called to him, ‘Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.’

“But Abraham replied, ‘Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been set in place, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.’

“He answered, ‘Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my family, for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.’

“Abraham replied, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.’

“‘No, father Abraham,’ he said, ‘but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.’

“He said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.’”

# **1 Timothy 6:6-19 New International Version (NIV)**

But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses. In the sight of God, who gives life to everything, and of Christ Jesus, who while testifying before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, I charge you to keep this command without spot or blame until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, which God will bring about in his own time—God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. To him be honour and might forever. Amen.

Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.

# Psalm 91:1-6  (NIVUK)

Whoever dwells in the shelter of the MostHigh
    will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.
I will say of the Lord, ‘He is my refuge and my fortress,
    my God, in whom I trust.’

Surely he will save you
    from the fowler’s snare
    and from the deadly pestilence.
He will cover you with his feathers,
    and under his wings you will find refuge;
    his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart.
You will not fear the terror of night,
    nor the arrow that flies by day,
nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness,
    nor the plague that destroys at midday.

# **Jeremiah 32:1-3 (NIVUK)**

This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord in the tenth year of Zedekiah king of Judah, which was the eighteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar. The army of the king of Babylon was then besieging Jerusalem, and Jeremiah the prophet was confined in the courtyard of the guard in the royal palace of Judah.

Now Zedekiah king of Judah had imprisoned him there, saying, ‘Why do you prophesy as you do? You say, “This is what the Lord says: I am about to give this city into the hands of the king of Babylon, and he will capture it.

# **Jeremiah 32:6-15 New International Version - UK (NIVUK)**

Jeremiah said, ‘The word of the Lord came to me: Hanamel son of Shallum your uncle is going to come to you and say, “Buy my field at Anathoth, because as nearest relative it is your right and duty to buy it.”

‘Then, just as the Lord had said, my cousin Hanamel came to me in the courtyard of the guard and said, “Buy my field at Anathoth in the territory of Benjamin. Since it is your right to redeem it and possess it, buy it for yourself.”

‘I knew that this was the word of the Lord; so I bought the field at Anathoth from my cousin Hanamel and weighed out for him seventeen shekels of silver. I signed and sealed the deed, had it witnessed, and weighed out the silver on the scales. I took the deed of purchase – the sealed copy containing the terms and conditions, as well as the unsealed copy – and I gave this deed to Baruch son of Neriah, the son of Mahseiah, in the presence of my cousin Hanamel and of the witnesses who had signed the deed and of all the Jews sitting in the courtyard of the guard.

‘In their presence I gave Baruch these instructions: “This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: take these documents, both the sealed and unsealed copies of the deed of purchase, and put them in a clay jar so that they will last a long time. For this is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: houses, fields and vineyards will again be bought in this land.”