

1

A drip of water doesn't seem like much, but have you ever had one that just wouldn't quit? This week a drip under my kitchen sink continued to seep out of a plumbing joint. I tried everything to stop it. First I tried Teflon tape, but the leak continued. Then I tried joint compound, but the water kept dripping. Finally I combined Teflon tape *and* joint compound together. When I turned on the water, it seemed to drip a little less, so using my adjustable wrench I gave the joint one more turn—and finally it stopped. No more drip!

While I found the drip irritating, the unnamed rich man in Jesus' parable would have delighted in just a little sip from my leaky pipes, for the wealthy guy was very thirsty due to feeling a burning sensation within himself. He was stewing over the way he treated a poor man Lazarus who had begged for just a few scraps of food from his table.

Jesus told this parable with lots of contrasts: the rich man is dressed in purple robes, the color representing wealth. Meanwhile the poor man is

covered in purple sores and bruises that dogs would lick. The rich man feasted every day, but the poor man begged for crumbs. One contrast hints that this story is about to change, for the rich man in unnamed, is anonymous, but the poor man Lazarus is named, has an identity.

Suddenly the playing field is leveled, for they both died, but then the contrasts are reversed: The poor man sits comfortably by the side of Abraham, while the rich man sits in the place of the dead feeling the heat of his mistakes in life, thirsting for a tiny sip of water.

I know it's tempting to interpret this story to suggest that the rich man suffered in hell while the poor man went to heaven, but that's not what the story says. The rich man went to Hades, which is the Greek translation of the Hebrew word Sheol. In Jewish thought, Sheol was the location where all people went when they died; it had nothing to do with sins or merits. Rich, poor, or in between, everyone ended up in Sheol.

2

Jesus suggested in his parable, however, that the roles are reversed in this place, that the rich can no longer depend on their wealth to bring them comfort, and the poor will no longer need to beg to find comfort. It's a bit like what we read in Psalm 49 this week on Tuesday morning in our Bible study:

<sup>10</sup>Everyone knows that the wise die too,  
just like foolish and stupid people do,  
all of them leaving their fortunes  
to others.

<sup>11</sup>Their graves are their eternal homes,  
the place they live for all generations,  
even if they had counties  
named after them!

<sup>12</sup>People won't live any longer  
because of wealth;  
they're just like the animals  
that pass away. (CEB)

Later the psalmist warns: "For when they die they will carry nothing away; their wealth will not go down after them." You know the old saying: you can't take it with you.

This week as we read this psalm, our group became a bit sullen, disheartened over the depressing words about death and Sheol, but then a glimmer of hope sprung off the page, buried in the middle of the psalm: "God will ransom my soul from the power of Sheol, for he will receive me" (49:15, NRSV)

We breathed a sigh of relief as we heard this hint of what God can do after death. Even though our resources cannot help us, even in the midst of our sins and shortcomings, God will save our *nephesh*, the Hebrew word translated as soul, life, mind, or heart. It refers to the inner mysterious part of ourselves, that part of us that somehow amazingly continues on after death.

No matter how much we collect in life, we discover, along with the rich man in Jesus' parable, that our stuff cannot save us—only God can. That doesn't stop some people from trying, such as one old miser who had no friends nor family. Just before he died he called his doctor, his lawyer,

and a minister to come see him. They complied and gathered together around his bed.

“I always heard you can't take it with you, but I am going to prove you can,” he said. “I have \$90,000 cash hidden underneath my mattress. It's in 3 envelopes of \$30,000 each. I want each one of you to grab one envelope now and just before they throw the dirt on my grave, you throw the envelopes in.”

Weeks later, the three attended the funeral, and true to their word, each threw in their envelope into the grave. On the way back from the cemetery, the minister said, “I don't feel so good about this, I am going to confess, I desperately needed \$10,000 for a new church we are building, so I took out \$10,000 and threw only \$20,000 in the grave.”

The doctor said, “I, too, must confess. I am building a clinic and took \$20,000 and threw in only \$10,000.” He looked ashamed.

The lawyer said, “Gentlemen, I'm surprised, shocked and ashamed of both of you. I don't see how you could in good conscience hold on to that money. I threw in a personal check for the entire amount.”<sup>1</sup>

The rich man in Jesus' parable may have also thought he could take his wealth with him, that it could get him into heaven. I wonder what he might tell us today if Jesus' parable could come to life.

*I'm not sure why I am here, for I had hoped this parable of Jesus would not come to life. I don't really want to tell you my story, for it's not a pleasant one. I am embarrassed that Jesus told this story about me. The story begins “once there was a rich man”—that's me! Jesus described how I was dressed in the latest fashions. There's nothing wrong with being fashion conscious, is there? But then he made the additional comment by saying that I was wasting my days in conspicuous consumption. I love to eat and buy whatever I want. There's nothing wrong with enjoying life, is there?*

*So far the story about me seems fine, but then poor Lazarus had to butt into the story about me. He got dumped at my doorstep, asking for food scraps. He was covered with sores, and I was afraid to get near him for I might become infected. There's nothing wrong with protecting oneself, is there?*

*I didn't help Lazarus, for I had more important things to do. I later discovered that Lazarus died that evening. But before you get all teary eyed, let me remind you that when Jesus told my story he didn't tell you about my social calendar the evening when Lazarus died. He didn't tell you about all the important things I had to do. He didn't tell you about how I donated to several charities using my money. He just told you I didn't help Lazarus.*

*But I guess all my commitments and resources didn't help me either, for the next day I died as well. I had a vision of the great Abraham, our most famous ancestor, holding Lazarus and comforting him. I cried out, "Father Abraham, have mercy on me! Send Lazarus to dip his finger in water to cool my tongue." As I remembered my life and the things I had said and done, I felt as though I was on fire. I needed a cooling off.*

*Abraham said, "You had all the good things in life, and now Lazarus gets the good things, for he lived a life of suffering."*

*I asked Abraham to send someone to warn my brothers, but Abraham replied, "Moses and the prophets have already done that, and no one paid attention to them, so what makes you think your brothers will listen now?"*

*Good point. I also had heard all the stories about following God's ways, but I ignored them. I*

*never wanted to listen, and so now I'm left feeling the pain that I caused others.*

*Wait. Maybe it's not too late. I'm here this morning, talking to you. In hearing my parable come to life, you could change your life. Here's my chance. Listen to what Jesus has to say. Follow God's ways. It's never too late to change your life. God is patient—even with me. God is forgiving, but God expects us to reach out and help others.*

*I'm already feeling somewhat better, now that I have admitted my mistakes in life. I thought I had it all made, but now I realize how much I was in need of what Jesus had to offer. You know...now that I have spoken, I feel as though I am drawing closer to God. Maybe I will get that sip of water from Lazarus after all. (Extinguish candle)*

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Whether we have many resources or just a few, you and I can't take it with us when we leave this place. So may we offer a morsel of bread or sip of water today, trusting that God will provide tomorrow.

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<sup>1</sup> Anonymous.