

“The Lazarus Question and Answer”

Luke included in his gospel some special material only reported by himself, so it is referred to as **Special Luke**. Our Scripture Reading today is one of those Special Luke sections of the Gospel of Luke. As Luke often did, he inserted the Parable of Lazarus with absolutely no context – as the Scripture Video struggled to report why Jesus told the parable. We don’t know to whom, where, when, or why Jesus told this story. **So, that leads me to ask the Lazarus Question of “What was Jesus’ Point in telling the Parable of Lazarus?” Further, “What is the Lazarus Answer?” – the answer to that question about Jesus’ Purpose for telling the Parable of Lazarus.**

As I alluded to earlier, this parable is not found in any of the other gospels in the New Testament. In fact, the name Lazarus is not found in the other Synoptic Gospels. It is found in the Gospel of John. A follow up question to the Lazarus Question might be **“In the Parable of Lazarus, was Jesus somehow referring to the same Lazarus found in the Gospel of John?”** The truth is no one knows with certainty the answer to that question. What is clear is the Parable of Lazarus was not Jesus’ attempt to retell how he raised Lazarus from the dead. However, **I personally perceive a connection between the two accounts – the Parable of Lazarus and the Resurrection of Lazarus.** Before getting into that relationship, let’s look at today’s Scripture Reading to find hints about the purpose of the Parable of Lazarus.

Where are we told the point of the Parable of Lazarus? There is no specific reason given for why Jesus told the parable. In the parable, the former Rich Man seemed to be saying there was an important lesson from his experience for his brothers. He said in **verses 27-28, “Then I beg you, father Abraham, send Lazarus to my father’s house, where I have five brothers. Let him go and warn them so that they, at least, will not come to this place of pain.”** What was the warning the former Rich Man wanted Lazarus to give to his brothers? Jesus didn’t include that in his telling of the parable. One might infer part of the warning would be to change their way of treating the poor but, even that, is not clear.

Jesus included a response by Abraham about the warning the brothers should heed in **verse 29, “Your brothers have Moses and the prophets to warn them; your brothers should listen to what they say.”** Unfortunately, Jesus did not have Abraham specify what Moses and the prophets said. But, the reference to the prophets may have indicated the former rich man and his brothers were guilty of mistreating the poor and other vulnerable persons, such as widows, orphans, and the foreigners.

So, was that the Purpose for why Jesus told the Parable of Lazarus? Only partially, if to any extent. Instead, the conclusion of the parable points in another direction to a different Lazarus Answer, for in the parable, Jesus had the former Rich Man appeal to Abraham in **verse 30, “That is not enough, father Abraham! But if someone were to rise from death and go to them, then they would turn from their sins.”** The new direction is more blatant as Jesus said Abraham responded in **verse 31, “If they will not listen to Moses and the prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone were to rise from death.”** The second portion of Abraham’s response, I believe, points us toward the Resurrection of Lazarus. Luke did not mention the name Lazarus outside of this Parable of Lazarus, so he does not seem to have been aware of Lazarus’ Resurrection but, **I suspect the source, who provided the report of Jesus’ Parable of Lazarus to Luke, was aware of Lazarus, Martha and Mary’s brother, and his resurrection.** Martha and Mary were included in the Gospel of Luke. Assuming Jesus actually told the Parable of Lazarus, we also know he knew Mary, Martha, and Lazarus and he either had already raised Lazarus or he expected he would when he told the parable.

Today’s Scripture is found in the portion of Luke’s gospel where **Jesus had turned his face toward Jerusalem – was heading to Jerusalem to die.** Since Jesus raised Lazarus during the weeks before he arrived in Jerusalem for the last time, it is possible **Jesus told the Parable of Lazarus soon after he raised Lazarus.** The Gospel of John implied the raising of Lazarus provided urgency to the decision-making process of the Jewish Leadership about the timing of their move against Jesus. It is reported in **John 12:9-11 and then in John 12:17-19, “A large number of people heard that Jesus was in Bethany, so they went there, not only because of Jesus but also to see Lazarus, whom Jesus had raised from death. So the chief priests made plans to kill Lazarus too, because on his account many Jews were rejecting them and believing in Jesus.”** John reported that as Jesus entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, **“The people who had been with Jesus when he called Lazarus out of the grave and raised him**

from death had reported what had happened. That was why the crowd met him — because they heard that he had performed this miracle. The Pharisees then said to one another, ‘You see, we are not succeeding at all! Look, the whole world is following him!’” All of that seems to fulfill Abraham’s last line in the Parable of Lazarus, “they will not be convinced even if someone were to rise from death.”

Therefore, the conclusion of the Parable of Lazarus and the Resurrection of Lazarus may very well have a close relationship. **Further, the Answer to the Lazarus Question – the question of “What is the purpose or meaning of the Parable of Lazarus?” seems to be heavily informed by the Resurrection of Lazarus.** I conclude Jesus’ Purpose in telling the parable was partly to reveal the extraordinary foolishness of the Jewish Leaders, who refused to believe Jesus was sent by the Divine Parent – the Son of God – the Messiah even though Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead. The other part of the Lazarus Answer was the “warning”. The implied warning to the brothers of the former Rich Man, as well as, to the Rich, Powerful, and Religious Elite was that if they continued to reject Jesus, they would miss out living the New Life in Christ – living the New Relationship with God and All People – living as a Citizen of God’s Kingdom both in the present and when the Kingdom is Fully Revealed, just as the Rich Man missed out sharing in the Messianic Feast in Heaven in the Parable of Lazarus.

Unfortunately, Luke was not an eyewitness of what happened during the Public Ministry of Jesus. **He may not have been aware of the Resurrection of Lazarus and how Jesus used the revelation of Lazarus’ Resurrection sarcastically to ridicule the Pharisees, the Teachers of the Law, and the Priests, as he told the Parable of Lazarus.** If Luke knew about Lazarus’ Resurrection, then I suspect he and the other Synoptic Gospels’ authors declined reporting it by the time they wrote their gospels because of their fear that Lazarus’ Resurrection might overshadow the Resurrection of Jesus. The crowd, which welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem included Jews, who knew about the Resurrection of Lazarus. If Jesus had been using the Resurrection of Lazarus, such as, when he told the Parable of Lazarus, then that may have poured fuel on the fire of the Jewish Religious Leaders’ scheming against both Jesus and Lazarus.

We don’t have the same issue Jesus had with the Religious Elite but the **Lazarus Question and Answer still inform and call us to reveal to others, who try to follow the self-centered and selfish life encouraged by the world – by Society, to accept God’s Invitation and Welcome to Live the New Life in Jesus Christ and the New Relationship with God and All People because God sent the Only Son, Jesus the Christ, to Prove and Demonstrate God’s Agape Love, Forgiveness, Grace, Invitation, and Welcome to Everyone.** Keeping in our minds and hearts the Lazarus Question and Answer, let us be about the work of answering Jesus’ Call by **Living the New Life in Christ and Living in the New Relationship with God and All People.** In the next few weeks, we have some specific and concrete ways we can do that. **First, World Communion Sunday – next Sunday, we will receive the Neighbors in Need Special Mission Offering.** We live the way of the New Life in Christ, in part, by helping our Neighbors in Need. Our second opportunity to specifically and concretely Live the New Life in Christ – to Live in the New Relationship with God is to be a **CROP Hunger Walker and/or Donor for the October 12th CROP Hunger Walk.** Friends, at this point, we only have five of us who are signed up to be a Walker and only a few donations are recorded. **Please let me know by writing “Walker” on the Registration Sheet in the Red Folder of your pew, if you are going to be a Walker.** If you are either unwilling to go online to make a donation or don’t have access to going online, **you can write a check out to Round Grove United Church and write CROP on the “for” line.**

Finally, as you interact with someone, who needs to receive God’s Invitation and Welcome, let our Divine Parent and Jesus work through you to share that Invitation and Welcome. Remember, **Round Grove United Church is committed to being a “God Is Still Speaking” Church, so we need to continue to live that commitment by Inviting and Welcoming All People – No matter who they are or where they are on life’s journey.** Amen.