

## Closing the Chasm

*In a parable Jesus said, "Besides all this, between you and us a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who might want to pass from here to you cannot do so, and no one can cross from there to us."*

I'm going to set this plant here. It is a common house plant called pathos. This plant has been through a lot. In 1995 I was working for The Tribune. One of the ladies in the office gave each of us a plant for Secretaries Day. It was planted in a coffee cup. It sat on my desk until I retired in 2012. Then I brought it home and it stayed in the coffee cup for several more years. Finally, I decided to replant it in a larger container with some potting mix. It has never received anything except some water over the years. It doesn't even get that when I am out of town. Please hold this plant in the back of your mind as we look at our readings today.

Today's readings from Amos, the Psalm, 1 Timothy and Luke's gospel tell us in plain, easy to understand language, what the prophets of old (and most especially Jesus) taught regarding the accumulation of wealth for oneself without regard for those of lesser means. "God condemns those who do not share their wealth". Period.

We can take that lesson from these scriptures at face value, "God is not happy with people who strive after riches and hoard what they have; particularly those who flaunt their wealth in the face of the needy".

I think there is something deeper than just sharing and caring for the needy people of society.

At the risk of sounding like Fr. Rob here; it is about our relationship with God, self, and others and more than that: it is about our LOVE. Taking that a step even further, these stories, parables, Psalms, letters, are warnings about what happens when we separate ourselves from God... and from others—and I mean others inclusive of all of creation—not just humans. It is those *others* that I want to talk about today.

The parable says that *a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who might want to pass from here to you cannot do so, and no one can cross from there to us.*

Notice it says a great chasm has been fixed. Notice it does not say who fixed it there and it does not say it can't be removed. The rich man never asks, "what do I need to do to change that?" He never accepts responsibility—never shows remorse—though he seems to by asking to have his brothers warned.

Remembering that this is a parable, what if it was the rich man himself that, by his own actions, caused the chasm to be fixed? Think about it. Perhaps unknowingly, during his lifetime he was building that chasm. Each time he denied Lazarus, the chasm—separation from God—grew wider and wider. Because he was lulled by his wealth and the good time he was having he did not remember the true call by God to all Jews was to care for the needy both in their midst and the stranger. It was *The Law*.

The chasm is our separation from God and what God loves. It is our response to God's call to us to be in unity with him and all of creation that can either close the chasm or widen it.

Now, I want to really stretch this. I am going to retell the parable we read from Luke in light of the theme we at St. Barnabas have adopted for this season: Creation Care.

"There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day on the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish in the seas. He drank deeply of the waters he had stored up building dams and changing the water courses. He scored the land by cutting down trees and mining for precious metals.

At his gate lay a poor man named Earth, scarred, and parched; with no shade or water, who longed to satisfy his thirst with the drips from the dams the rich man had built. The man's flora and fauna lay with him at the gate withered and sighing with hunger and thirst. The elephant, the lion, the humpback whale, the wild lilies of the field, the rainforest trees, barely alive.

The poor man and all that suffered with him died and were taken by angels to a heavenly place where they were healed. The waters ran again, the flora and fauna began to flourish and the scarred places disappeared.

Soon after the rich man also died because there was no water, no animals, no trees. All that was left was Hades, where he was being tormented. He looked up and saw the heavenly place far away with Earth now lush with soft grass, shady trees, animals no longer lean and hungry, and water flowing freely.

He called out, "Oh heaven, have mercy on me, and let some of Earth's water drip down here and cool my tongue; for I am in agony in these flames."

But heaven said, "Oh man of riches, remember that during your lifetime you received your good things, and Earth in like manner evil things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in agony. Besides all this, between you and us a great chasm has been fixed, so that you cannot pass from there to us and we cannot pass from here to you."

He said, "Why was there no warning?"

Heaven replied, "You did have warning. There were many signs and prophets but you did not listen and take heed."

But the man said, "But those were just words. Can there not be a do over?"

Heaven said to the man: "If you did not listen to the prophets and the signs then, neither will you listen if you have a do over."

In this parable the rich man represents human greed and the poor man, Earth, is the "other" I spoke of earlier—all the rest of creation. The chasm is the separation from God and creation. It was built by the lack of attention and love for what God loves. Instead, greed seized humankind centuries ago and has continued to this day.

We have had warnings from scientists—we can call them prophets—for years on various fronts regarding the poisoning of our oceans, overuse of fields for crops, the disappearing rainforests due to the cutting down of trees for cattle farming and our consumption. Most recently the Amazon River is being polluted for gold mining. The list of human atrocities toward Earth and its flora and fauna is large indeed.

The more we benignly ignore the groans of Earth the wider the chasm becomes.

Our 21<sup>st</sup> century world has had numerous warnings given by scientists, but also by Earth itself. The chasm of relationship between humans and the rest of creation seems

to be growing wider and wider. And with that, our relationship with God who not only cares for humans, but how we treat other humans and all of creation.

Now I want to make a clarification here. As Christians we know our Lord Jesus by his death and resurrection has closed that chasm. But we must respond with action and thanksgiving.

As with the Rich man in the parable, humans have a responsibility to care for the needy—and the needy includes our water sources, our animal habitat, our trees, and yes and even our little house plants.

This houseplant is amazingly resilient. It has rejuvenated itself for 27 years with just enough care.

You see, the problem with the Rich man was that he neglected to do right by Lazarus. I'm sure we can all sit here and think of ways he could have helped him.

So, if Lazarus is our Earth, how much more should we think of ways to close the chasm that is every widening between us and the rest of creation.

Like my plant, the earth is resilient and can rejuvenate when given the rest and time it needs. And we have the responsibility to ensure that that happens.

How?

What I am going to say here is not something new. You have heard it before—perhaps many times. But I am going to say again, out loud to remind us.

First, we can reduce our personal “carbon footprint”—recycling, using reusable bags (now that we can do that again) and watching our gas and water consumption.

But we also need to be active in advocating for change on a larger scale.

Our Prayers of the People for this season are tugging at us. Are we listening?

I want you to ask yourself? Am I benignly sitting back enjoying the fruits of the earth, even unintentionally, and unknowingly widening the chasm of my own separation from God and creation? What will I do to change that?

Let us work together, right here, at St. Barnabas, to act responsibly, with the land that we have, to educate ourselves and our community about more ways we can help rejuvenate the earth.

Rev. Susan Arnold  
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Let us pay attention to our personal and corporate use of Earth's produce and let us advocate with voice and vote for change in systems that misuse and pollute.

Let us work to close the chasm between us and creation by actively loving what God loves; building that strong relationship of love for God and others as well as ourselves.

I'm going to close with one of my favorite prayers from Daily Prayers for all Seasons:

Generous Giver you pour forth your extravagant bounty without measure upon your whole creation. Teach us such generosity that the fruits of our Spirits and the works of our hands may build your commonwealth of blessing. Amen