

**Luke 16:19-31**

‘There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man’s table; even the dogs would come and lick his sores. The poor man died and was carried away by the angels to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried. In Hades, where he was being tormented, he looked up and saw Abraham far away with Lazarus by his side. He called out, “Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am in agony in these flames.” But Abraham said, “Child, remember that during your lifetime you received your good things, and Lazarus 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 those who might want to pass from here to you cannot do so, and no one can cross from there to us.” He said, “Then, father, I beg you to send him to my father’s house— for I have five brothers—that he may warn them, so that they will not also come into this place of torment.” Abraham replied, “They have Moses and the prophets; they should listen to them.” He said, “No, father Abraham; but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.” He said to him, “If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.” ’

**Isaiah 9:2-4**

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness—on them light has shined. You have multiplied the nation, you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as people exult when dividing plunder. For the yoke of their burden, and the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian.

**"Trapped"****Rev. Rebecca McFee****October 10, 2010**

I don't know if you've heard the story of the United Methodist minister who was trapped in a snowstorm. She was driving and got herself in a bad situation where all she could see was white, and she realized she really was not prepared. She didn't have the things in the car that you'd want to have. So she pulled over on the side of the road, as she could feel her anxiety getting higher. She thought, "Maybe I should just collect my thoughts, think of a plan." As she was sitting there, she remembered her father always saying to her, "If you're ever in a snowstorm, get behind a snow plow, and they'll get you to safety." So she waited, and not long after that, a snow plow came to her rescue. She moved her car behind the snow plow and just started following it for quite some time, to get her to safety. After a while the snow plow stopped, and a man hopped out of the snow plow, out of the truck, and came to her. She stopped the car behind him and rolled down her window and the man said to her, "Ma'am, I'm finished here at Walmart. Are you also going to follow me over to K-Mart?"

Well, we do find ourselves trapped sometimes, don't we? And what we find is often when we're trapped, we also lose perspective. We don't see the big picture, because we are a survivor just trying to make it. In fact, 66 days ago, on August 5<sup>th</sup>, which was my birthday, and I only say that because I think the story was a bit heightened because here I am celebrating here in Fort Collins, my birthday, and hear this story that a mine had collapsed and they could not find the miners. It was lucky for them that it had collapsed at lunchtime, because instead of being scattered throughout the mine, they were all in one area. And so, for 17 days they searched, and on Day 17, they found that all of them were still alive.

I want to tell you a little bit about their lives, because I want to talk about what it means to be trapped, in ways, for them being trapped is a reality, it is their whole existence right now. Also we can say some things about what it means to be trapped in other ways, spiritually and emotionally. They live in darkness. They did have some flashlights. And now they live with more light because NASA experts have been able to create patterns of light and darkness so they can sleep and keep their metabolism in the right place. They live with 90% humidity, if you can imagine. They battle fungus and bacteria. They live in a tunnel that's half a mile long, and in that half mile there are three large caverns or rooms that they have created, part of it being a makeshift chapel. All the supplies that they receive come from a supply line that is only 3.19 inches in diameter, and from that supply line they have received water, food, and certain notes from their families. They've also received an iPod that gives them music, but because of the advice of the psychological team, they're not allowed to have earbuds because that would become too individualistic. So they have to listen to the music in community.

One of their first requests, besides communication with their families, were cigarettes and wine. They were denied this. This caused an uproar with some of the miners. The teams of psychologists said this was a good sign, that they were rebelling, because it showed they were mentally well and alive. Indeed, they are in good health, mentally stable. For the most part, they couldn't ask for more. There are many other details, one being that they've been given books to read about public speaking, because the anticipation is that when they get out, they will be in front of the media, and it will be a time in which they will be asked to speak quite a bit about their experiences.

Can you imagine what the first 17 days were, not knowing if you would be even found? And now, today, they live this life of anticipation that they will be rescued, but they're still down there, 2,000 feet under the ground. Did you hear the good news yesterday? They've been able to drill into where they are, and whereas it was thought that they would be rescued after Christmas, now they anticipate it will be Wednesday of this week. It's a celebration. We can use examples of these to talk about what it means, to be in a place of life in which we too, though we are not in a cavern that is dark and damp, certainly we know of times in our lives in which the metaphor is strong. We think of individual lives of people in poverty or lacking education, people in bad relationships, who really don't know how to get out. When we think of people who pray for a miracle or ask God to be a true savior here and now in their life, we know it's because they're asking questions like, "When will this end?" "When and how can I get out of this situation?" And it's easy,

sometimes, for us to look at the person over there that looks trapped, but I think that we all have been there, and in some ways we continue to be, because we ourselves know we are trapped in emotional ways, ways of which we may hate another person, or hate ourselves. Ways in which we don't know how to move to the next situation. Ways in which apathy or self-indulgence has kept us almost buried under boulders. It doesn't mean that we're only in poverty to be trapped, sometimes it's wealth that traps. It doesn't mean that we're hungry that traps, sometimes it means the overindulgence of everything we can have that traps.

And that's what brings us to our Scripture today. The question that underlies this parable, that isn't spoken but you can know that it is the intent of Jesus to ask this of the crowd, is, who is trapped in this parable? Because we would automatically assume it's the beggar. We would need to help that beggar, and in fact that's what happens in that parable. The beggar gets the reward and sits with Abraham at the end of this life. But Jesus continues the parable in ways we really don't want him to, because Dives, this wealthy man, is trapped too. He's trapped in the indulgent life that he leads. In fact, one commentary said that it's very significant that the passage says that he wears purple. It suggests that he wears purple from top to bottom, inside and out, including his underwear. I'm just passing that on to you, I don't know. But purple was important, because purple was the most expensive of all the dyes at the time, so to wear purple was only what the wealthiest could afford. He was not only into his things, but he wanted people to know just who he was.

But Jesus needles us, and he needled that crowd, to ask, "Who are you in this parable?" Where are we in the midst of looking at ourselves? What traps us? I'm intrigued by one person's reading of this parable. It was the theologian Albert Schweitzer, and I'll come back to the parable in a minute, but I want to tell you first who he was as a man, to make this make sense for how he read this parable. First I can say he was a theologian, and a controversial one, at that. He had views of how to interpret Scripture that many people of his time found very problematic. He wrote a Biblical studies book entitled *The Quest for the Historical Jesus*, and there he made a reputation for himself as a Biblical scholar. He knew the parables of Jesus inside and out because he taught them.

Not only that, he had a degree as a musician. He had written a biography of Bach that he wrote first in French and later had written in German. He was one of Europe's finest organists. That seems like enough, but wait... there's more. He also became a medical doctor and a surgeon. Later he would go on, due to his service as a medical doctor, to win the Nobel Peace Prize in 1952. His status throughout Europe was incredible. In all ways, this was an amazing man who people loved to hear even when he was controversial on points. And yet, you know what happened when he read this story that we read today? He had read it many times, but there came a day when he read it and he said to himself, "I'm the rich man. I'm the man that's trapped in purple clothes, in the status of my ability to live in all the grand circles of Europe." And he read the parable, and that was when he made his decision that he would leave Europe to begin his ministry as a physician in what they called then and he called "darkest Africa."

I want to read to you an excerpt that comes out of a TV show that was created through Brigham Young. "At the graceful bend of the Ogooue River in Africa sat Lambarene, the hospital compound of Dr. Albert Schweitzer. Among its rusty roofs he worked miracles, healing not only the bodies of his patients but also the souls of millions who witnessed his labors from afar. Schweitzer loved the Ogooue. The encroaching forest and the silver current, the quietude broken by screeches of distant birds, the rowers singing in rhythm to their strokes. He once wrote that he could not travel the river without feeling reverence to all forms of life. Every evening after dinner, he would announce the hymn to be sung, the Dr. Schweitzer, one of the finest, foremost interpreters of Bach, a master on the organ who could fill any concert hall on earth, would place his hands on a dilapidated keyboard of his old piano and play."

Norman Mailer wrote that the piano seemed to lose his poverty in his hands. Word that Schweitzer was leaving Europe for Africa sent gasps throughout the cultural centers of the West. And then it continues, "Indeed, he was the catalyst for many people, not just in Europe but in this country." One of my first appointments was in Wisconsin at a United Church of Christ, and there was a man who served as the chief cook for Albert Schweitzer for many years. He'd love to come in the office and just tell stories of all the miracles of education and healing through medicine that were done there.

Well, I think it's important to say that we are not just people who are trapped, but we are people of a Gospel that preaches good news. We are people of the resurrection that believes in the liberation of ourselves and other people, of a savior that truly saves. And so we come to this story of the miners, and we rejoice that the news has come that this hopefully this week will be the week in which they will be reunited with family. In which they will begin a new life, indeed, truly a new life for them because they have up to this point lived as impoverished miners of Chile, and they will begin a new life as they are in the media and receive financial compensation.

We are people, like Albert Schweitzer, who challenge ourselves with Scripture. I want to say I'm always cautious to not throw out these big, extreme stories, Albert Schweitzer's story being one of them, because sometimes we'll sit there and not think we can relate to that. But if we can ask ourselves the question, "How are we a part of the release for other people who are trapped? How are we a part of Christ's liberation, here in Fort Collins, or in the ministries that you have chosen to be a part of? Because that's where Christ's body is alive. Some of us may choose to go to Africa, we do have a group here who will be going to Africa soon. But that doesn't have to be the way it is for you. The question is, who will we be in setting other people free, in holding the hand of Christ who is our own liberator. And opening those questions of how Christ can liberate us. I invite you to those questions and I invite you to the challenge that when we are liberating others, the paradox of the Gospel is that we liberate ourselves. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Amen.