

In the Gospel this morning, we see a person named Lazarus.

First of all, let me just say that this Lazarus is not the same one who is the brother of Mary and Martha. There is more than one Lazarus in the bible. Just like there are about 20 Mary's.

So—*this* Lazarus is a broken man, poor, very ill—he's covered with sores. He's so ill he can't work, and so he lies at the gate of a very rich man. Someone in the rich man's household evidently has pity on Lazarus and they occasionally bring him scraps from the rich man's table.

What's interesting is that the rich man knows Lazarus well enough to know that his name, but he doesn't invite him inside, tend his wounds, or feed him properly. While the rich man may know Lazarus' name, but he doesn't treat him as if he has *worth*.

So—they both die. The rich man is being tormented, though we're not told how-- in the world of the dead (Hades), but Lazarus is now conversing with and being comforted by Father Abraham.

The rich man notices this glaring discrepancy. He thinks he can continue on in the afterlife like he did in mortal life. He's a) thinking he's more influential than Lazarus, and b) still ordering the poor man around to do his bidding. The rich man is, after all, the more important person. He is shocked when his self-importance is ignored by those in charge.

Notice that there was never any indication of physical abuse or actual mistreatment aimed at Lazarus by the rich man during his life. Abraham merely points out that the rich man lived in comfort while Lazarus was tormented and now the roles are reversed. If there is any sin here, it's the fact that the rich man ignored

Lazarus. He wasn't wicked to him; he was just indifferent to him. He didn't care.

The rich man thought a lot about his own worth—both in the sense of monetary worth, and his sense of personal worth.

But somehow he was missing the sense that while not everyone in the world was blessed with wealth-- everyone had as much *personal worth* as he did.

Psychological studies have shown that the people who feel most whole are people who have a sense of their worth—not because of what they have or do—but because they believe that *all human beings have worth*—by their very nature.

These people—some call them “whole-hearted people”-- have lives that may contain wealth and learning and creativity—but they don't need these things to make them feel worthy.

Studies have also shown that those who are struggling, struggle because they feel for whatever reason they are not worthy of love or respect, they are not enough: they need something else- a prestigious job, lots of money, people's esteem-- to fill the lack they perceive within themselves.

If only we could be more comfortable in our skins, just being who we are—we would count ourselves blessed. Each of us is unique. And God loves us in all our uniqueness. If we could just rest in who we are, what we've been given, and treat everyone we meet as just as blessed and loved by God, we would be living in the kingdom.

But many people think it's not enough. They become caught up in appearances—keeping them up, having the “correct appearance”, hiding who they are to become someone who is more worthy.

So they become what they do or what they have, thinking it makes them somehow more worthy than others.

They are now better than the poor homeless person who cries because he can't stop drinking, or the mentally ill person who struggles daily with things we can't even imagine.

When we begin to think we are worth more than these people who may be nameless to us, but who God knows by name—we create a chasm.

*We create a huge deep chasm between us and them.*

When human beings don't understand the worth of all people, we become indifferent to them. We're not wicked to them; we're just indifferent. We don't care.

And that's a mighty big chasm to cross.

We can't bridge the chasms without vulnerability. We need to look into ourselves and see if there is something in us that is justifying our building separation between us and another.

And then we have to ask ourselves: can we get to a place where nothing separates us?

I think this kingdom is possible only if we realize that all human beings have worth. Each person has worth. Each person is enough. I am enough. Lisa. You are enough. Each one of you.

Why do we always do and do and do more? Because we don't believe that. But we are.

If you don't believe me, look at Lazarus.

Amen.