

Year C, September 29, 2019
16 Pentecost (Proper 21)
Christ Church, Mexia

"Every time I hear the word *apathy*, I remember the words of a friend of mine who taught high school just long enough to realize he shouldn't have been teaching high school," says Charles Swindoll in *Living on the Ragged Edge*. "He was assigned to teach a course filled to the brim with students who did not want to learn. In fact, it was one of those classes where you had to arrive very early to get a back seat. A couple of fellas got there so late, they were stuck on the front row. They couldn't care less what the subject was.

The teacher finally got fed up with their apathy. He grabbed a piece of chalk, whirled around to the chalkboard and began to slash away in big, foot-high letters, 'A-P-A-T-H-Y!' He underlined it twice, then slammed an exclamation point on it that broke the chalk as he hammered it against the board.

One of the students up front frowned as he struggled to read the word. Unable to pronounce it, he tilted his head to one side as he started spelling it aloud then mispronounced it. Then he leaned over and muttered to his buddy, 'What in the world is 'a-paythee?' His friend yawned back with a sigh, 'Who cares?'"

"A-paythee," sorry, apathy is generally defined as a lack of feeling, emotion, interest or concern about something, or as a state of indifference, or the suppression of emotions. It also involves a lack of action. As Billy Graham once said: "Heaven is full of answers to prayers for which no one ever bothered to ask."

The rich man in the parable told by Jesus today clearly seems to be apathetic. Of course, the rich man didn't truly ignore Lazarus, he even knew his name. He didn't do anything TO him. He didn't drive him away from his gate, for example. But he didn't do anything to help him either. His sin, if you will, was one of omission, "things left undone" as we say in our confession each Sunday. He marginalized him as we so often continue to do today, to allow the poor and needy to become part of the ignored background, somewhat like billboards or signs along a highway, or to view them as projects instead of people.

My purpose today is not to lay a guilt trip on you. Although no doubt, we, individually and collectively, could be doing more than we are. I

know that's true for me. But rather it is my intention to challenge perceptions that, whether they are right or wrong, we use to make decisions, and to perhaps also look at this parable in ways other than the most obvious way. Could we be the five brothers of the "rich man?" for example.

Jimmy Dorrell, who started the Church Under the Bridge, Mission Waco and other ministries and organizations for the poor and homeless in Waco, talks about how difficult it is to minister to others when we are living in comfort. He recounts from his own life how when a person came to his door to collect food for the poor, he would go to his cabinet and select the hominy and other canned goods that he was unlikely to use and donate them; then he would pat himself on the back for having done such a good deed. I'm sure that we can all recall similar incidents in our lives. We tend to give from our plenty, but we seldom give sacrificially – in part, because we don't relate to the other person or persons. As Jimmy states in his book, ***Trolls and Truths***, which is based upon people he's met primarily through the Church Under the Bridge (literally under an overpass of I-35 in the heart of Waco – except now during I-35 construction when they have been displaced to the Silos):

Jimmy wrote: "The basic assumption held by most middle-class Christians is that they are here to help the poor and unfortunate. Very few of them understand how much they need the poor in their own lives to help them grow in faith and understanding. Relationships between rich and poor change both parties."

Relationships ... It's not just the giving, however well-intentioned, or even sacrificial. And we shouldn't do it because it's the "right thing" to do. "The poor are not (our) projects, but persons made in the image of God and called to be servants with us," continues Jimmy Dorrell. Or as the Rev, Susanna Metz puts it, "Jesus preaches the Kingdom of God. ... To be part of God's kingdom is to ... see people differently... To see another the way God sees that person is to live in the kingdom of God."

To do so requires us to examine, honestly examine, our perceptions, our stereotypes, our way of thinking and believing. That's not an easy task – and that's why we are called to worship regularly, to study God's word, to pray and to DO something, unlike the rich man in today's gospel. But the "doing" should involve establishing and maintaining relationships ... not marginalizing and ignoring which leads to giving in a detached manner. Everyone in need merits help

from those in a position to give it - because we are all brothers and sisters in Christ.

And let me leave you with one last thought, we are all rich in one special way – because of God’s unconditional love for us. Let that love and our joy in having it be the basis of our relationships with one another.

In the name of the One God, the Creator, the Word, and the Spirit.
Amen.