**20250928 Luke 16.19-31 I know your name**

When I was born, one of my Grandmothers couldn’t get her tongue my name, so for most of the time, I was known to her as Curtsey. Over the years I’ve been known as Katie’s daughter, Megan’s mum, Tom’s mum, Pippa’s mum (dog owners are generally known in relation to the hound), in my previous work as the cake maker.

I’ve had a couple of occasions with another clergy person who has asked my name, to which I answered, ‘Kirsty’, he said , ‘are you Kirsty Borthwick?’ No, I am not Kirsty Borthwick.

The second time I met him, he asked my name, ‘Kirsty’, and guess what, he said….’are you Kirsty Borthwick?’

Surprisingly, there are more than 1 clergy Kirstys around.

It really irritated me, it made me feel less than. Clearly, Kirsty Borthwick is someone he wants to meet for whatever reason. If he asks me one more time if I am Kirsty Borthwick bad things will happen. The barrier will be going up between him and me. And the irony is, he’s got one of the commonest male names around.

When someone knows your name and knows you, properly knows you, it is precious. Only the other day a chap said, ‘see you around Kirsty’, and it surprised me as I didn’t think he knew my name.

Jesus tells a graphic parable and names one of the characters. Imagine what’s happening, picture the scene in our current context.

The Rich Man has off the scale wealth. He’s hosting lavish banquets, so let’s assume he has many friends and hangers on who attend these great feasts. Daily sumptuous feasting, this is wild, reckless wealth. And then his clothing, he’s got the best, that’s described to us as the purple linen- oooh! Just imagine that! The best designer gear, Prada, Louis Vuitton, Chanel. He has it all.

And then there is the poor man, Lazarus.

He is ill, covered in oozing sores, and too weak to push the dogs off him that lick him. He longed just to eat the whatever fell from the Rich Man’s table; scraps would’ve been enough to ease his hunger.

He’s the only person in any of Jesus’ parables who is named. Interesting, huh? And why does Jesus specifically name him?

To stress the point the Rich man also *knows* his name. Lazarus resides by his door. The Rich Man has to pass him on a daily basis.

On their death, one goes upstairs, one goes downstairs.

There is no judgement given here, it just is.

And now it gets even more interesting.

The Rich Man speaks to Abraham, and there’s no remorse or repentance here, he asks Abraham to tell Lazarus to do his bidding. This man has learnt nothing.

Nothing from his earthly encounters with Lazarus during his lifetime, he still assumes Lazarus can do his bidding and treats him as his slave. ‘Send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am in agony in these flames.’ [[1]](#footnote-1)

So here’s the thing, Jesus never made a universal indictment against wealth, there is nothing in this parable that states the Rich Man went downstairs because he was rich. One of the frequently misquoted verses from the bible is in our first reading from 1 Timothy, people misquote it as ‘money is the root of all evil’ whereas it’s ‘the *love* of money is a root of all kinds of all kinds of evil.’[[2]](#footnote-2)

A chasm, a great gulf, a barrier has been created that cannot be bridged, and this barrier was created by the Rich Man’s lack of compassion. He knows Lazarus, he knew his name and does nothing.

And still with arrogance, he asks Abraham to send Lazarus as his personal messenger boy to go and warn his brothers of the fate that awaits them. Go on Lazarus, go and do my bidding.

We all know a Lazarus, or several Lazaruses. This is not a parable to enlighten our hearts and minds to people on the other side of the world necessarily, this is about people *we know and live amongst*.

The Church is called to serve, to be the body of Christ where we are, right here, to become more like Jesus. To care for people who are in material poverty. Not because we think them to be deserving, there is no moral dimension, no judgement of whether we believe them to be worthy candidates, only because their circumstances have made them poor.

No one wants to be thought of as poor but let us state it as being in deficit or deprivation. Financial deficit, the burden of acute or chronic illness, grief, educational deficit, bodily ability.

Also, we are in this parable, not named but we are there; we, are the brothers. The story is warning us of the barriers *we* are putting up in this life, not God, God’s not erecting barriers, we will be all too aware of the barriers in the next life if we don’t act now.

Martin Luther King preached on this reading naming his sermon as ‘The Impassable Gulf’ charging his listeners with the disparity between fortune and misfortune is unjust and that they should work to bridge that gap. He said ‘(the Rich man is) the white man who refuses to cross the gulf of segregation and lift his Negro brother to the position of first-class citizenship, because he thinks segregation is a part of the fixed structure of the universe.’[[3]](#footnote-3)

Too often we shield ourselves from human distress. The enormity of someone else’s situation is beyond us. We may not be able to undo the complexities of their lives. Yet we know we are *all* loved unconditionally by God. Isaiah paints a vivid image of God showing us his hands with his children’s names written on them.[[4]](#footnote-4) In Matthew, Jesus states even the hairs on your head are counted![[5]](#footnote-5) And still, how can we say we love God if we don’t love his people, the way he does.

Gustavo Gutiérrez, the Peruvian liberation theologian said, "If you love the poor, name them." [[6]](#footnote-6)

We can all name a Lazarus, and Jesus is demanding change, for Lazarus and also for us. It is a challenge because we are steeped in a consumerist, individualistic society, but he tells us this good news because transformation can change lives, for Lazarus and us.

1. Luke 16.24 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. 1 Tim 6.10 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/impassable-gulf-parable-dives-and-lazarus-sermon-dexter-avenue-baptist-church [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Isaiah 49.16 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Matthew 10.29 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. https://kellylatimoreicons.com/en-gb/blogs/news/gustavo-gutierrez [↑](#footnote-ref-6)