

---

## *Whose Name Will You Remember?*

**A sermon by the Rev. Nate Huddleston**  
**Proper 21 – Year C**

If there is such a thing as purgatory; it is middle school. It doesn't help when you are the smallest kid in your class! I was a foot shorter than any of the other middle school boys and two feet shorter than any of the girls! With long brown hair parted down the middle, my neck had a preputial tick to keep my hair out of my eyes. As you can see those long locks are distant memory.

Dressed in baggy pants and Airwalk skateboard shoes I was woefully underdressed. The standard uniform of my day was Umbros, a polo shirt, and the Bo Jackson Nike Cross trainer; the golden calf of teenage shoes. It only magnified my feeling of being out of place as I walked into youth group for the first time.

That feeling only grew until Andrew walked in. Andrew Thayer, who is now the rector of Trinity Episcopal Church, New Orleans, is a larger than life personality. A former SGA actor, talented musician, and a PhD graduate of Oxford University, he was my first youth minister. Full of energy and charisma he fills every room he enters. You can't help but notice, but more importantly, he is someone you hope notices you. Andrew is one of those people whose presence you can't help wanting to be around.

He gathered us like a springer spaniel flushing pheasants ensuring not to miss anyone including me. I can't tell you what the lesson was that night, what game we played or what bible passage we discussed. None of that really matters because as I walking to the parking lot desperately hoping that my mom got the memo not to be late, so that I wouldn't be the last one picked up, every middle schooler's nightmare, I heard a voice say: "See you next week Nate!"

Whipping around, as if the principal had just caught me running down the hall, I saw Andrew looking at me. It was Andrew. He not only knew my name, but he had called me out personally. And in that moment, I knew he knew me. He had even called me by name. For a short priest's kid, struggling with his self-image and his place in the world, it was like a really cold drink on a hot Georgia afternoon. Andrew's seemingly insignificant gesture let me know that I was not alone. Someone knew my name and maybe this church thing wasn't so bad after all. As Dale Carnegie said: a person's name is the sweetest sound they can ever hear.

Names are important, which is why the inclusion of the name of the beggar, Lazarus, in today's gospel reading is essential for us to notice. In the past few weeks we have heard of the shrewd manager, the good shepherd, and other adjective-inspired characters; but today's lesson is the only parable Jesus told where he gives a name to one of the characters. By giving him a name, it reinforces the idea that this poor, ulcerated, and pitiful creature is a human being, a person created in the image of God. And the name he gives him is important because Lazarus means "God has helped."

The parable is chocked full of details, which are critical for us to understand the full meaning of the text. The rich man is described as wearing purple colored clothes, which suggest his status as a member of the noble class. The word for linen indicates it is imported Egyptian cotton, even then considered to be the finest money could buy. His dining habits are described as those of one who always consumes food from a 5-star restaurant or from a gourmet store. Even the chasm that separates the rich man from Abraham and Lazarus is over-exaggerated. The language used to describe Lazarus' position at

Abraham's bosom is extravagant. The entire parable is on the hyperbolic side.

Many times, people view this parable as a diatribe against the wealthy, that rich people are going to hell. It would be easy to sit up here and rail in a John Lithgow Footloose character posture about the evils of wealth. But that is to miss a more important and essential detail. Abraham, who is the stand-in for God, is still in conversation with the rich man. Even in Hell God never gives up on having a relationship with his children. Our separation from God and redemption is never final or absolute. There is still time for the rich man to see Lazarus as a child God.

Abraham's answer to the rich men, that they have Moses and prophets, is telling us that we have all that we need. If we read the Hebrew Scriptures clearly, we will find that God notices the widow, the orphan, and the poor—the least, the last, and the lost. More importantly, God knows their names.

We must start to peel back the layers of indifference in our eyes and see as God does. One of the responses in our baptismal covenant to respect and guard the dignity of every human being. Our response is: I will with Gods help.

But how do we let God help us? First, we must understand in the very depth of our being that there is nothing we can do to make God love us more and there is nothing we can do to make God love us less. We are loved by God without hesitation or equitation. And if God can love someone like me, then God can love anyone and everyone. God sees us not as an angry parent or judge, but with loving and caring eyes. So, we should see each other with loving and caring eyes. God hurts because we hurt, therefore, as the apostle Paul says, "If one member suffers, all suffer together." (1 Corinthians 12:26)

"And though all our laboring, God also labors: to deliver what is whole in us from what is broken, to deliver what is true in us from what is false, until in the end we reach the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, Paul says- until in the end we become Christ ourselves, no less than that: Christ to each other and Christs to God." (F. Buechner)

We can make a new and right beginning by learning and remembering each other's names? Not just the ones we know can help us, but especially, the ones who cannot! It made a difference in my life, because remembering a name carries the indelible mark that we are all loved. So whose name will you remember?