

STOP! LOOK! LISTEN!
Jeremiah 32:1-3, 6-15; Luke 16:19-31

The most recent Saint added to the long list of saints in the Catholic Church is Saint Teresa. There was much discussion prior to her being considered for sainthood. Some in favor – others not so much. Though I have had several things that I wanted to do in my life, the one that I now know will never come to pass is to go to Calcutta, India and work with Mother Teresa. I know people who have, but I did not take the chance when the offer came my way, and that will always be a regret.

A little about one of the modern-day disciples whom I admire:

Mother Teresa was a plain and ordinary Yugoslavian girl, except for the fact that she devoted her life to Jesus Christ and she made a decision to become a nun in the Roman Catholic Church. She was trained to be a schoolteacher, and off she was sent to Calcutta to work and to teach school.

A century ago, Calcutta, India was considered one of the most beautiful cities of the world, and it was a lovely place to live, having such wonderful, dignified architecture and buildings. But poverty and massive starvation gripped that city in a terrible way and Calcutta became a very nasty place to live, an ugly place of poverty. According to many, it was called one of the “hell holes” of earth. To that city, Teresa went to live and teach in a convent. It was a beautiful convent and scholars say that her convent was like a glistening white oasis in a desert of starvation. It was this beautiful convent with large, flowing manicured, green lawns. There were lovely palm trees, the buildings were made out of white stucco with a tall, high whitewashed, stucco wall around the compound. It was like an oasis in the midst of starvation. And there, in that place, Teresa started to teach.

According to one book I read, Mother Teresa would go up to her bedroom on the second floor of the convent where she could look out over the whitewashed walls and see the poor and starving people of Calcutta. What she saw was transforming for her. She was very upset by what she saw, and God started to work in her young life. It wasn't enough to drop coins over the wall for the poor as a means of solving a guilty conscience. It wasn't enough to drop crumbs of bread from the high safety of the walls to the needy below. Something had to give. She had to do something. She felt a compulsion in her to reach out and personally touch the hungry and starving people on the streets below. So she finally asked her Mother Superior if she could be excused from being a schoolteacher and began her face-to-face ministry to the poor.

With only the clothes on her back, this young girl crossed the street and *touched* the skin of a dying man. She did not watch poverty from a safe distance, but she crossed the street and touched poor people. *She touched for the first time* in her life, and it was like her hands became on fire. Her heart became on fire. The feelings in her fingers became on fire. And the revolution erupted in her life. Something happened. The Spirit happened. And shortly thereafter, after telling of her experience to her friends, two or three other young women crossed that street from the oasis of a convent, and reached out and touched the faces of dying people, convinced that that dying person was a child of God. These young women lovingly bound up their wounds and helped these people to die. Thus began a ministry that affected hundreds of thousands of people – the poorest of the poor – as well as the richest of the rich who came to work side by side with Mother Teresa.

Mother Teresa was moved by the words of Our Lord to join in the ministry that took her to Calcutta to teach. Mother Teresa took time to look at the needs around her and listening to God guiding her life, she stepped across the street, into a whole new life, of healing and service.

One of Mother Teresa's favorite questions to those who came to work with her was, "So you want to do something beautiful for God, eh? You want to do something beautiful for God, eh?"

Today as we look at this passage of scripture with the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, I ask you, "do you want to do something beautiful for God, eh? Do you want to do something beautiful for God, eh?"

Jesus said, One time there was a rich man who ate sumptuously every day. Steaks, baked potatoes. Sour cream, bacon bits and all the trimmings. Caesar salad and wine. Baked Alaska for dessert. It was great. He also dressed impeccably, with color co-ordination like you wouldn't believe. He had this look of sophisticated wealth about him. His clothes spoke the message clearly: he was Rich! Outside his house was a poor man by the name of Lazarus. He was in rags. He smelled and had sores on his body, and the dogs would come by and lick his sores. The rich man would come out of his house and he would not see Lazarus. Instead he would step around Lazarus and pretend that he wasn't even there, not wanting to be contaminated by Lazarus' secret disease associated with poverty. One day the poor man died and the rich man died also. We are all going to die sometime. The rich man went to hell and the poor man wound up in heaven. It was very hot in hell, causing the rich man to shout to heaven, "Faaaathhher Aaaaaabrhaaammmmmmmmmmm. Father Abraham, send Lazarus down here to dip his finger in the water and cool my tongue for it so very hot down here." Father Abraham called down from heaven in a loud voice, "Richhhh man. Ricochet man. I can't send Lazarus down . There is a hugger space between here and there. There is a huge rave even between heaven and hell. You cannot travel between the two." There was silence. The rich man tried again, calling again to Father Abraham, "Then send Lazarus back to earth to my five brothers and warn them. Convince my brothers what they need to do so that they will not end up with me in this hot place. Father Abraham shouted back over the expanse of space, "Rich mannnnn, your brothers have the law. They have the prophets. They have the Holy Scriptures. They know what to do." There was silence. " Faaatherrrr Abrahaaammmmm, if someone raises from the dead, then maybe my brother's will believe and care for the poor." Father Abraham shouts back, in words that echo across space, "He was raised from the dead and it did not do any good. They didn't even listen to him." And, thus, the end of the story.

So, what does this parable say for us – today? As we try to grapple with this parable and we strive to answer the question Mother Teresa asks, "do you want to do something beautiful for God, who?"

Many scholars believe this parable to be about the rich man and Lazarus; however, others think it to be more about the five brothers – and sisters. That is about us – you and me - the brothers and sisters who are here, on this earth, trying to get it right, trying to do a beautiful thing for God. That being said, then the real point of this parable can be found in the lines of the song, "Reach out and touch some bodies hand, make this world a better place if you can."

How? First, we stop- slow down enough to actually see the people around us and acknowledge their presence in your midst. Look - around you and see the people God has placed in your life. And, Listen – as they tell you what they need and about their lives; but even more important, listen as God prods you, leads you, guides you to do something beautiful for God. I'm not saying that each of us should go to Other countries to serve the sick and the poor, but I am saying that we can do what Jesus directs in this parable and what Mother Teresa did in Calcutta, right here in Thomasville, NC.

*Reach out and touch somebody's hand; make this world a better place if you can.
Reach out and touch somebody's hand; make this world a better place if you can.*