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Luke 16:19-31

Parable of the rich man and Lazarus

The Rich Man and Lazarus

<sup>19</sup> “There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. <sup>20</sup> And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, <sup>21</sup> who longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man’s table; even the dogs would come and lick his sores. <sup>22</sup> The poor man died and was carried away by the angels to be with Abraham.<sup>[a]</sup> The rich man also died and was buried. <sup>23</sup> In Hades, where he was being tormented, he looked up and saw Abraham far away with Lazarus by his side.<sup>[b]</sup><sup>24</sup> He called out, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am in agony in these flames.’ <sup>25</sup> But Abraham said, ‘Child, remember that during your lifetime you received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in agony. <sup>26</sup> Besides all this, between you and us a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who might want to pass from here to you cannot do so, and no one can cross from there to us.’ <sup>27</sup> He said, ‘Then, father, I beg you to send him to my father’s house— <sup>28</sup> for I have five brothers—that he may warn them, so that they will not also come into this place of torment.’ <sup>29</sup> Abraham replied, ‘They have Moses and the prophets; they should listen to them.’ <sup>30</sup> He said, ‘No, father Abraham; but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’ <sup>31</sup> He said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.’”

Lets take a look at today's parable. The rich man was blessed with wealth in his life. Lazarus, on the other hand, lived a poverish life, ignored at the gates of the rich man. Both men die and their rolls are reversed. In his after life Lazarus is blessed and raised to the position of the right hand Abraham, while the rich man finds himself suffering in Hades. What are we to make of this reversal of rolls?

Author Jennifer Donnelly of the book "*Humble Pie*" offers us the opportunity to get to know Theo, a young boy that thought of nobody but himself.

"Once upon a time, and a long time ago, there lived a very bad boy named Theo.

He thought of nobody besides himself. He never helped his father with the chores, or shared his toys, or gave a penny to a poor beggar. He never gave a bit of sausage to the dog or a lick of milk to the cat.

No one knew why Theo was so awful, but some had theories. His uncle said he ate to much pepper. The village apothecary said he had a small troll living inside him. Just under his liver. Only Theo's grandmother knew the truth: the boy was spoiled rotten!...The more he got, the more he wanted. He became demanding and arrogant. Selfish. Thoughtless. Inconsiderate. Grabby. Unkind. Rude and lazy. Obnoxious. And mouthy<sup>i</sup>."

Like Theo, the rich man did not see what he was doing wrong in life. First century Pharisees believed that Godliness is in alliance with riches; Prosperity was a clear sign of God's favor. For those that followed the law where thought to be highly favored by God. The equation was clear wealth=Blessed of God=obedience to God's commandments. While there is no

denying there are scriptures to support the Pharisees position that the righteous prosper while the wicked suffer. Jesus believed that the Pharisees' were grossly misinterpreting the prophets of the Old Testament. Since Jesus taught us to bless the poor, and share our assets with those in need<sup>ii</sup>. The rich mans sin was not that he had wealth but that he was not a good steward of his wealth and did not share it with those in need<sup>iii</sup>. As Theo does not see his selfishness neither does the rich man.

Wealth is not the only thing unequally distributed in our country. Did you know the “most recent government survey found 48.8 million Americans are living in food insecure homes<sup>iv</sup>, and do not know where their next meal will come from.” While a sky rocketing numbers of Americans are living with food insecurity “80 billion pounds of food is wasted in the US each year, about 40% of everything grown<sup>v</sup>.”

If you where in the grocery store would you be able to recognize if someone was living with food insecurity? Have you ever heard a child crying because they want something and simply assumed the parents just didn't want to buy it for them? Or have you ever listened and heard the plea of a parent who wants so badly to buy that apple but just can't afford it?

It is not always easy to distinguish who is in need. For many middle class families it is a major struggle to put healthy food on their tables. With the rising costs of fresh produce and meat, the lowering costs of prepackaged, processed foods, and the cost of meals in a fast food restaurant costing less than a healthy balanced home cooked meal. Families are forced to choose unhealthy options. Leaving most under nourished, resulting in astonishing numbers of obesity in our country.

Last we left our little friend Theo no one could figure out why he was such a terrible boy. But Grandma seemed to know. The story goes on to tell us how one day when his mother's patients were gone. Theo demanded strawberries his mother had just picked. When Theo's mother refused to allow him to have the strawberries, Theo caused a ruckus and strawberries flew all over the kitchen.

“Theo knew he was in trouble. He ran out of the kitchen before his mother could catch him and through the woods to his grandmother's house. He found her in her yard making a pie. She was rolling out the top crust, making it bigger with every push of her rolling pin. Bigger than a nine-inch pie, bigger than a ten-inch pie. Bigger than a tablecloth. Bigger than a bed sheet. So big in fact, that when she was done, she had to hang it over her cloth line.

“What kind of pie is that Grandmother?” Theo asked.

The old woman smiled a wise smile. “Humble pie, child.” She said

“I want some!”

“You shall have plenty,” she said, filling the pie with buckets of fruit.”

...

“Greedy Theo leaned against the pie and snatched a cherry. He leaned over farther and reached for a plum. As he was about to grab it, he lost his balance and toppled forward. Quick as a wink, his grandmother flipped the top crust over him and crimped the edges. Theo was sealed in the pie!”

“Hellllp!! He shouted. “Grandmother, help me out!”

“Only you can do that, child.”<sup>vi</sup>”

For many in our country having healthy nourishing food in their homes is struggle. Food pantries and soup kitchens are doing their best to provide healthy food for those in need but with limited recourses and volunteers they are finding it difficult to keep up with the growing demand. We need to find more sustainable ways to bring healthy, affordable food options to everyone.

One model that may be seen as a sustainable option is the Daily Table. On June 4, 2015 Doug Rauch, Former president of Trader Joes, opened Daily Table in Dorchester, MA. Daily Table, as their website says, is a not-for-profit retail store that offers the community a variety of tasty, convenient and affordable foods...Daily table provides both “Grab-n-go” ready to eat meals, along with a selection of produce, bread, dairy and grocery items all at prices designed to fit within every budget<sup>vii</sup> .

By working together with growers, supermarkets, manufacturers, and other suppliers that donate their excess. Dailey Table is able to keep their costs low and provide healthy “ready-to-go” meals made fresh daily and healthy grocery store options at prices competitive with the fast food option found in the community. With prices like \$1.29 for a dozen eggs, \$0.70 for a box of cereal and \$0.55 for a can of tuna Daily Table is reducing the dependency on local food banks and providing families with the ability to put healthy food options on their tables. “Rather than charity, Daily Tables innovation-allows for a large reduction of food waste, and a smaller impact on customers pockets<sup>viii</sup>.”

Jesus does not teach us this parable to tell us we need to give away all of our wealth, but to invite us to be good stewards of our wealth and to recognized and see those in need. We are called to find permanent sustainable ways to equalize the unequal distribution of assets in the world and in our country. If we are wasting 80 billion pounds of food each year while 48.8

million Americans live with food insecurity we need to develop more sustainable models like Daily Table<sup>ix</sup> to help distribute what would be wasted to those in need at prices they can afford.

What ever happened to our friend Theo who's grandmother wrapped him in a humble pie and left him to find his way out. Theo was able to get the pie rolling. As he was rolling along looking for help he learned that his "demanding and arrogant, selfish, thoughtless, inconsiderate, grabby, unkind, rude and lazy. High-headed and mouthy<sup>x</sup>" ways made him unfavorable to his friends, and family. No one would help him because he had not cared to help any of them.

Theo, inside his humble pie, rolled into a poor village that had been experiencing famine for sometime. The villagers rejoiced at the miracle of the larger than life pie that had arrived. "Just as they were about to slide it into the oven one of them stumbled. Theo was pitched headfirst into the crust. The soggy pastry gave way, and he burst from the pie."... "By the time he got home, it was evening, he saw the cat in the yard and patted her head. He whistled for the dog and scratched his ear. His mother came out of the barn with grain for her chickens. Theo took the bucket and fed them himself. When he was done, he chopped some wood for kindling. Then milked the cow. The cow look surprised." ... "Looks to me like the boy got his just desserts." Theo's grandmother proclaimed<sup>xi</sup>.

Like Theo in our book "*Humble Pie*" the rich man did not see where he went wrong. Theo's grandmother gave Theo the lens of a humble pie to see the error of his ways. Like Theo the rich man was given the opportunity to see the error of his ways. He had been given the laws of Moses and the word of the Prophecy to live by. But unlike Theo, who recognized his need to change, the rich man never saw his greed.

Doug Rauch saw the world through his own Humble Pie. He used his wealth and experience to develop a sustainable model for providing healthy food options at affordable prices to those at risk of food insecurity.

When we except that God loves us unconditionally and embrace the graces that God bestows upon us, we can live humble and piest. Imagine what could happen if more of us saw the world through the lens of a humble pie.

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<sup>i</sup> Donnolly, Jennifer D. *Humble Pie*. First Edition. New York: Atheneum Books for Young People, 2002.

<sup>ii</sup> Craddock, Fred B. *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching. Luke*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1990.

<sup>iii</sup> Dunn, James D., and John W. Rogerson. *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible*. Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003

<sup>iv</sup> Table, Daily. *Daily Table*. 2015. [www.dailytable.org/faqs](http://www.dailytable.org/faqs) (accessed March 2016, 2016).

<sup>v</sup> (Table 2015)

<sup>vi</sup> (Donnolly 2002)

<sup>vii</sup> (Table 2015)

<sup>viii</sup> Zebra, Plaid. *Plaid Zebra: An Uncoventional Lifestyle Magazine*. December 2015, 2015. [www.theplaidzebra.com/new-grocery-store-lets-you-buy-health-food-for-the-price-of-fast-food](http://www.theplaidzebra.com/new-grocery-store-lets-you-buy-health-food-for-the-price-of-fast-food) (accessed March 20, 2016).

<sup>ix</sup> (Table 2015)

<sup>x</sup> (Donnolly 2002)

<sup>xi</sup> (Donnolly 2002)