



ST. ANDREW'S IN THE PINES EPISCOPAL CHURCH

Sermon by Pastor Jami Anderson, Sept. 26, 2010

This week I checked out a great book from the library. The book, “Girl in Translation”, tells a true story of young Kimberly as she and her mother immigrate to the United States in the late 1980’s when Kimberly is 11 years old. The family member who has sponsored them installs the mother within the first week in a garment making sweatshop in Chinatown in New York City. Kim is enrolled in a public school but is expected to get to the factory immediately after school to help her mother make her daily quota of work. They are paid 1.5 cents per piece of finishing work and they often don’t arrive back home before 9:00 p.m. As Kimberly slowly learns to speak English, something her mother is never able to learn spending all her waking hours at work, Kim finally makes friends with a Caucasian girl named Annette. Annette begins to invite Kim to come over to her house after school, a request Kimberly has to repeatedly turn down. One day Annette insists on knowing why she is always turned down and Kim tells her she has to go work in a factory everyday to help her mother. The next day at school Annette tells Kim that she isn’t telling her the truth because Annette’s father told her that no children in the United States work in factories. Kimberly learned then to never speak about the life she was living.

I hear from people I know when they travel in India or Cambodia or Africa or other places around the globe, that one troubling aspect of their trip is the amount of beggars that surround them wherever they go. They are especially troubled by all of the children who reach out their arms and make pleas for help, for anything. While I have never had that experience, I have watched movies like *The English Gardener*, set in Africa, and I remember the infomercials by Save the Children - where I am reminded with visual images about the conditions of poor children around the world. As my traveling friends tell me and as I think about the pictures I see, it all is overwhelming. There are so many people that don’t have enough for the necessities of life. What is one to do?

I wonder which situation it was for the Rich man? Was it that he just didn’t see Lazarus? That Lazarus was hidden from his sight and could be ignored, like the children working in sweatshops? Or was it that Lazarus was one of so many beggars, that the Rich Man was overwhelmed and hurried by, crippled by the immensity of the poverty that surrounded him? I wonder which situation created the chasm between Lazarus and the Rich man? Whichever it was, the Rich man never spoke to Lazarus, never acknowledged his existence, never entered into a relationship.

And from these stories we learn that Heaven and Hell can exist in the same place, at the same time. Heaven and Hell can exist in the same place, at the same time. Heaven and Hell and the chasm in between them. That chasm which the Rich man finally notices and says he wants to change, or close.

But did you pay attention to the Rich man's attempt to close the chasm between heaven and hell? He starts by ordering Abraham to send Lazarus to come and help him out with some water. Then he asks Abraham to go warn his brothers. Never does he offer to do anything. Never does he ask how he can help. Always he treats others as his servants – even the representation of God in Abraham. The chasm between heaven and hell can not close for the rich man for his life remains centered on self rather than centered on God or others. His life and his wishes remain more important than everyone else. He remains in hell.

“Dare we be Christian” is a challenging book written by Walter Rausenbusch in the early 1900's. One statement I remember from the book warns against looking at any other human being as a means to a profit rather than as a neighbor – looking at human beings as a means to a profit rather than as a neighbor.

If Lazarus had been seen as the rich man's neighbor, if Kimberly and her mother had been seen as a neighbor, if every human being is viewed as our neighbor – then the chasm would close and everyone would have enough for the necessities of life – food, housing, education, and health care. The rich man never learns that relationships can close the gap. He remains separated from the shared mutuality of being human.

I noticed last week, as Leanne and Patty and Phil told us about their trip to Tanzania, that a shift was occurring in our outreach project and the recipients of our money were becoming our neighbors. Relationships are developing. Stephen has visited us. Patty, Leanne, and Phil have visited them. Sandy McCann will be here visiting us in a few weeks. Maybe our youth will take a pilgrimage there someday. We are learning that our lives are connected in new and unique ways. We are living as the church in this world.

And I believe that the church – you and I – can close the chasm between heaven and hell through mutual relationships with others – whoever and wherever they may be. When we notice others – and I thought that was a wonderful element of our walk-out line last week at the end of worship – when we notice others – see them, acknowledge them, and recognize their importance, we shall live our lives differently than the rich man lived his.

We will live realizing that we brought nothing into the world and we can take nothing out of it. If we have enough to eat and a place to sleep-we have more than enough. So we can be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share. We will have godliness with contentment and heaven will have come close.

Thanks be to God.