

## **No Regrets**

**Luke 16:19-31**

The Apple corporation seems to be enjoying continued good fortune just now. Their new iPhone 11 is doing well, as is its stock. Which reminds me of Ron Wayne. Ron was one of the three original founders of Apple, along with Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak. He helped to steer the computer company in its early days, and had a hand in designing the famous Apple logo. Wayne owned 10 percent of the company, while Jobs and Wozniak each owned 45 percent. But Wayne decided to hand back his stake, fearing that he would be liable for a \$15,000 loan if the company went under.

Apple succeeded, of course, and if Wayne had held on to his stake it would now be worth more than \$37 billion. Does he have any regrets? Surprisingly, no. In an interview a while back with James Thomson of SmartCompany magazine, Ron said, "I made my decision on the information I had at the time. I've got my health, my family and integrity; and that is the best fortune you could ask for."

Thirty-seven billion dollars lost, and no regrets. How is that possible? Jesus' Parable from the Gospel according to Luke this morning can help us understand. A rich man, traditionally named Dives, (which is just the Greek word for rich man), was "dressed in purple and fine linen and feasted sumptuously every day" (Luke 16:19). The man dies, is buried and finds himself in Hades being tormented (vv. 22-23).

Does he have any regrets? A lot, Jesus tells us. But none of his regrets involve poor business decisions or missed opportunities to make money. No, the rich man's regrets seem to match a trend we are seeing today. In a recent report of deathbed regrets, not one participant in the study listed the missing of a business meeting as a regret. Nor did any of the terminally ill regret missing any of the usual "Bucket List" items.

No, the top five regrets were these:

*#5: I wish that I had let myself be happier.* People admit that they wish they had laughed more and allowed themselves to be sillier.

*#4: I wish I had stayed in touch with my friends.* People felt badly that they were so caught up in their own lives that they had let friendships slip away.

*#3: I wish I'd had had the courage to express my feelings.* Many people, taking the affection of others for granted, realized too late that they should have expressed their love much more, and much more extravagantly.

*#2: I wish I hadn't worked so hard.* This regret was about all that time spent working, that they now wished they'd invested instead in their relationships with family and friends.

And the biggest regret of all was, *#1: I wish I'd had the courage to live a life true to myself.* This was the most common regret of all. Instead, said the report, the respondents had compromised so much of their own personal moral code that they had lived as people they had never intended to be, "and had to die knowing that it was due to choices they had made, or not made."

So, let's ask, what would you and I regret if this were our last day on Earth? Jesus tells us that the rich man was not alone in his life or his death. "At his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man's table; even the dogs would come and lick his sores" (vv. 20-21). Lazarus may have had some regrets too, but they probably did not include *I wish that I had let myself be happier*. For Lazarus, happiness was not a choice. It was a scrap from the rich man's table. Jesus tells us that "the poor man died and was carried away by the angels to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried" (v. 22). And there, in Hades, we begin to get a sense of the rich man's regrets.

The first regret: *I wish that I had cared for the people around me.* The poor man Lazarus was lying at his gate, covered with sores, and the rich

man would have had to step over or by him each time he left his home. Every single day, the rich man missed the chance to give help to Lazarus.

The second regret: *I wish that I had listened to Moses and the prophets.* The rich man realizes in death that he had not paid attention to the word of God as it came through Moses, who commanded, "you shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Leviticus 19:18). He had not heeded the prophet Isaiah, who commanded, "share your bread with the hungry ... bring the homeless poor into your house" (Isaiah 58:7).

The third regret: *I wish I'd had the courage to live a life true to myself.* The rich man didn't have the courage to live a life of integrity, one in which his actions were in line with what he knew was right. The rich man saw the poor man and knew that Moses and the prophets commanded him to help. But he did not.

Despite all this, we shouldn't jump to the conclusion that he was heartless, or cruel. He could easily have fallen into the very same trap that many better-off people fall into in our day; where we blame the Lazaruses of our land for their poverty, insisting that they must be lazy or morally deficient. That may be true in a few cases, but it's not the rule. He probably sat around his table with his rich friends who might well have excused their indifference by saying something like, "God helps those who help themselves." (That's not in the Bible by the way. That saying was Benjamin Franklin's in Poor Richard's Almanac.)

In Hades, the rich man feels great regret. He calls out to Abraham, "I beg you to send [Lazarus] to my father's house -- for I have five brothers -- that he may warn them, so that they will not also come into this place of torment" (Luke 16:27-28). The rich man cares deeply for his brothers; he is not a man without feelings.

Abraham replies, "They have Moses and the prophets; they should listen to them" (v. 29). But, the rich man realizes that Moses and the prophets had not been enough for him. "No, father Abraham," he pleads; "but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent" (v. 30). Surely they will turn their lives around if dead Lazarus comes back to life and warns them! Shaking his head, Abraham says, "If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead" (v. 31).

The irony of that last statement should not be lost on you and me. Abraham is talking there to us. Are we convinced? Are we persuaded to change our ways if someone actually rises from the dead? Jesus has risen from the dead, yet, even among some who most loudly proclaim their allegiance to Jesus there is the conscience numbing belief that cutting food aid and training programs for the poor is actually their way out of poverty.

Jesus has risen, but are we still poised for deep regrets. Now, let's be clear: None of us is perfect, and we will all come to the end of life knowing that we have made mistakes along the way. There are choices we feel badly about, alongside opportunities we wish we had seized, and actions we should have taken. But, what would it mean for us to die with *no regrets*?

The top regrets of the rich man can teach us the lessons that we are to heed. We don't have to arrive at our deathbed saying: "I wish that I had cared more for the people around me. I wish that I had listened to Moses, the prophets, and Jesus. I wish I'd had the courage to live a life true to myself, in which my actions were in line with my beliefs."

We don't have to, because here's the Good News Jesus is saying: for you and me it's not too late. We are not stuck in a place of regretting that we did not do more, that we did not choose wisely, that we did not

give enough time. As long as we are breathing, we can choose now to care for the people around us, we can follow now the teachings of Jesus, and we can live now a life, from this moment on, that is true to our deepest convictions.

If we will choose now, our life's outcome will change. The choices do not even have to be large to be life changing. A small change in our daily schedules can make a big difference in someone else's life, and in our own. It's a matter of putting our actions in line with our beliefs; living a life from here on of integrity by God's standards. And, all that you can do starting right here at Christ Church. We provide opportunities to help the Lazaruses right around us in our neighborhood. These opportunities are listed on the bulletin boards as you head into the Parish Hall. Don't pass them by. It's a change that is made one choice at a time. The result: a life You and I won't regret.