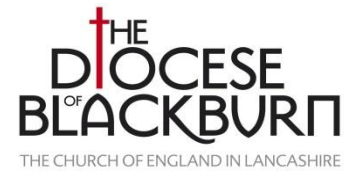


WEEKLY SERMON

communicate@blackburn.anglican.org



Jarring contrasts

Working in sector ministry there is, thankfully, less call for me to conduct funerals than there is for my parish colleagues; but from time to time they do come up.

Occasionally (and very sadly) there are some occasions where there are no friends or family who can come and pay their respects. These are difficult services where I want to provide a fitting service, ensuring that the individual is treated with respect and decency in death as I hope they would have been in life.

It is harder though, commending someone into God's loving and tender mercy in an empty crematorium than it is in a full one.

I had one of those funerals recently and I was drawn back to it as I watched the spectacular services and procession for our late Queen.

Westminster Abbey, full of dignitaries from the United Kingdom and around the world. A procession of military and civilian services leading her to her place of rest. This all came after the queues of people who had waited to see her lying at rest in Edinburgh or lying in state at Westminster and the many who thronged the streets, first in Scotland and, later, in London to watch Her Late Majesty's coffin pass by.

There was no shortage of people to say how well the Queen lived her life, and rightly so.

It was an awe-inspiring, jaw-dropping event like none I had seen before. I was incredibly proud to be part of this country and to work for one of Her (now His) Majesty's services; but the contrast between the two funerals is jarring.

The contrast between the rich man and Lazarus is also jarring. It is a tale of two lives intertwined with each other, but who never interacted. Both personalities are described in rather over-the-top ways, the rich man with a lavish wardrobe and eating sumptuous meals everyday compared with Lazarus, who is not only poor, but the dogs lick his sores making him poor and unclean.

They are caricatures and we are not meant to personally identify with either, the meaning is in the story that accompanies them.

Lazarus in death is carried by angels to the side of Abraham, whereas the rich man is buried and tormented in Hades.

Jesus challenged the expected norms as he reverses their roles in death. It's important to realize the rich man is not cast downward because of his wealth or because of his refusal to provide aid to Lazarus in his time of need.

It is rather, only after he finds himself in post-mortem torment that the rich man sees Lazarus.

Perhaps it was his wealth that caused him to be blind to the plight of the poor who were right outside his house, but the warning is there for us all not to be blind to those who are in need.

We are told that we can see in the scriptures that God's heart is with those in poverty, this passage encourages us to open our eyes and move our hearts to help ease suffering and to identify with those who need support.

Rev Calum Crombie, Managing Chaplain, HMP Wymott

HEALTHY CHURCHES TRANSFORMING COMMUNITIES