

Getting There The gospel passage for today can create a very striking image in our minds with the descriptions given of these two main characters and the reversals which happen after their death. The word chasm appears at the end of the text after their death. The word chasm means a deep crack in the earth's surface, an abyss or possibly a wide divergence of feelings or interests. Despite the use at the end of the story, fact is that it was possible the two men came into each other's presence before their deaths. And it may be the chasm was probably even deeper when they were alive. The narrative begins describing the rich man and his lifestyle. He dressed in purple and fine linen, things only available to the very wealthy. He also feasted extravagantly on a daily basis. The rich man is not actually given a name by Jesus but has often been called Dives which is Greek for rich. The contrasting description of the other man and his situation could not be greater. Jesus gives the poor man who appears at the rich man's gate a name— indicating that Jesus sees him and his condition where the rich man does not. Lazarus' condition is so dire that he is at the gate because someone in the community has taken him there and left him so that he is lying there within sight, but not seen. Our English translations that Lazarus was in such a poor state that he did not arrive at the gate on his own do not make this factor clear. Our text just says that Lazarus lay there, whereas the Greek verb is in the passive—he was laid there. Lazarus being covered with sores and only longing to get what fell from the rich man's table which was what the Syrophonecian woman story tells us often went to the dogs. Dogs which are now providing the only aid Lazarus is receiving. Lazarus' condition could not be direr; while the rich man's seems especially blessed. Both men die suddenly with no cause given for either death. Angels carry Lazarus away to be with Abraham, while the rich man finds himself in Hades. Despite the familiar phrase of being in the bosom of Abraham, the text only says that Lazarus is now with Abraham, therefore presumably in the presence of God. In a sermon from 1523, Martin Luther's comment was that the "bosom of Abraham" was not a place at all—but the Word of God. This was of more interest then than now because of the ongoing Protestant Reformation and discussions about purgatory. Actually, despite many attempts to use this parable as a means to define heaven or the afterlife that was probably not the intent of the teaching. Jesus' concern was for those who heard him to understand God's position on the treatment of others. From his position in Hades, it seems that the rich man can see Abraham and who is now there with him. He can even carry on a conversation with Abraham—still ignoring Lazarus. From that position in Hades where he is being tormented, the rich man makes a request of Abraham: "Father Abraham, have mercy upon 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." It is at this point that the far away distance between the rich man and where Abraham and Lazarus are is now described as a "great chasm which has been fixed." At this point, he is told there is no traveling between the two places. The narrative seems to indicate that this state is there to balance the scales between what Lazarus had with what the rich man had while alive. From the scenario set up by this text we are called to understand that there is this gap in earthly experiences; it calls on us to mind the gaps, to recognize the great chasms which we create between people and peoples; gaps which prevent relationships; gaps which restrict access to abundant life. Just describing the chasm does not end the teaching because even the 9 great reversal which happened to the rich man did not allow him to actually see Lazarus. Instead he saw someone who could be sent to relieve his sufferings. When the rich man finds Lazarus cannot be sent to provide him with water, he still is blind to Lazarus' status as equal to him as a child of God. He requests that he be sent to warn his family where his life's choices have led him. It seems that it is his failure to observe the ways of the covenant by providing care for others while indulging himself so extravagantly has created this situation. It is not that he has wealth but what he had not done with it that is the problem. The parable tells us some in the community so

strongly felt that Lazarus' state should have been his concern that they took him to the rich man's gate so his status could be seen. Yet the rich man remained blind to the needs just outside his gate; so close to his coming and goings highlights his lack of concern for others. Even from Hades, the rich man could only find concern for those of his own immediate family wanting them to be warned. As this conversation with the rich man begins with that first request, Abraham calls him child. He has not rejected the rich man. He just explains that the rich man's actions have placed him there. When the request for Lazarus to be sent to his family is given, Abraham's reply is "they have Moses and the prophets; they should listen to them." Not said, but strongly implied is: just as you should have. The information has always been available just as it is so frequently ignored. The final exchange from the rich man claims that sending would be different as this message would be from someone coming from the dead. I think the most direct point for us to reflect on is Abraham's final response: "If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead." How convinced are we of what matters most to our Lord? In our text today and earlier, Amos tried to tell the people of Israel that they've forgotten how things are with God; what it means to have a right relationship with God. They've become comfortable, lazy, fat and selfish. Those who are in control are living lives of lavish ease not caring that others are being ruined by what they are doing. Amos tells them misery will come to them as a result of their choices. God's economic plan looks a lot different from the ones Israel and Judah have created. So does ours if we look closely that gap between the 1% and the 99%. The number living in the "middle" is steadily shrinking according to all the data on the current economic situation. If the lens is expanded to include those in other countries the gap is even more pronounced. Throughout the book of Psalms, the psalmists praise God who is just; who cares for the stranger and sustains the widow and orphan, those who are marginalized by the world then and now. From the earliest recorded words God has revealed this as God's own nature: justice and concern for all. When Jesus responded to that question about God's most important commandment, one of the two he gave was about love of neighbor. In today's Epistle reading from 1st Timothy, the writer reminds Timothy of what it means to be a follower of God. The faithful disciple looks outward rather than inward; is content, and pursues "righteousness". This is a call to recognize those chasms we create and to work to close them, to work to make sure that all are invited to the banquet, to have a seat at the table and eat well: so none are forced to seek crumbs from the table or wait outside the gate. When we follow our own way, we get caught up in the love of what money can provide stopping at nothing as we look out for ours and ourselves alone. Doing this is then we ignoring Moses and the prophets; including the one giving this teaching who is the one who rose from the dead our Lord Jesus. The Timothy text warns that love of money is the root of all evil because God longs for us to pursue something very different. God desires us to pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness as the prescription for abundant life for ourselves and others. These are the characteristics in our life that reflect our right relationship to the One we worship. Luke places this parable in the context of a series dedicated in part to money throughout chapters 15 and 16. The parable does not exactly depict a reversal of fortune—blessedness is not the opposite of luxury. People seek comfort in luxury, and certainly having enough makes it easier to be happy. Yet research shows that luxury has little to do with long term happiness. Somehow even at the end the rich man hasn't gotten the point—which is probably the point of the parable for us. The parable ends with the question of people who do not get the point. Surely we are told that Moses and the prophets provide enough reason to treat other people with dignity—which by continuing to treat Lazarus as a servant he can send somewhere shows that the rich man hasn't gotten the point. The question for us is why after Jesus' resurrection so many of us still have

not gotten the point. We are very focused on getting to the place where Abraham and Lazarus reside, but often fail to consider how what we do put roadblocks in our way. God's grace is a free gift but when we accept that gift there should be an adjustment of our ways to those of God. We are called to trust in God not the possessions we may obtain here. Previously Jesus proclaimed that one could not love and serve God and money so perhaps that is the issue. Loving money leads to a love of self and self-serving behavior. Loving God leads to a right relationship which includes love of others for they also bear God's image within. Getting there depends not on what we have or things we do if we don't have that right relationship with God. Having that right relationship will get us there whether we are rich or poor because we will be blessed in the presence and love of God. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.