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Speakers: Myron Penner

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Transcription Started:

Myron Penner: The Lord be with you.

Speaker 1: And also with you.

Myron Penner: The holy gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Saint Luke.

Speaker 1: Glory to you, Oh Lord Jesus Christ.

Myron Penner: Our gospel reading this morning is found in Luke's gospel Chapter 16 beginning at verse 19. That's found on page 741 of your pew bible. Luke 16:19:

"There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores. Time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side.

The rich man also died and was buried. In hell – which is actually the afterlife, "Gehenna," where he was in torment he looked up and saw Abraham far away with Lazarus by his side. So he said to him, "Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue because I am in agony in this fire."

But Abraham replied, "Son, remember that in your lifetime you received good things while Lazarus received bad things. But now he is comforted here and you are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you, a great chasm has been fixed so that those who want to go from here to you cannot. Nor can anyone cross over from there to us."

He answered, "Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my father's house for I have five brothers. Let him warn them so they may not also come to this place of torment."

Abraham replied, "They have Moses and the Prophets. Let them listen to them."

"No, father Abraham," he said. "But if someone from the dead goes to them they will repent."

He said to him, "If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead."

The gospel of Christ.

Speaker 1: Praise be the Lord Jesus Christ.

Myron Penner: Please be seated.

Well now, that's some gospel reading. And I'm not going to actually address that one in this sermon time. I'm going to talk a lot about what a sermon is and give a little sermon afterwards. We have these texts that I told you that we listen to each week. And these are predetermined for us. They're chosen.

In fact, there's a schedule of text. And there are three years that it runs on so that your A, your B, and your C and these are chosen for us. It's called the "revised common lectionary." And Roman Catholics use this. Lutherans use it. The bulk of Christian denominations use this to guide us, which means we have text that are chosen for every Sunday. And by the time you go through the three-year schedule you have read I think something like 85 percent of the bible out loud in church.

Now what's really important to us is that we believe that it's important to just listen to God's word being read because God will speak to us through it. But then we also have this sermon time. Well, what I want to emphasize is at least two things; first of all, that we sit under scripture. I like that phrase. It's a phrase that Stan Hauerwas, who is an American theologian uses it, "We sit under scripture," because it's through scripture that we learn what God has to say to us.

But this whole liturgy of the word – remember what I said that you can summarize everything that we're doing here as about one thing, what was that?

Meeting Jesus.

So we meet Jesus in the Word and we meet Jesus in the sacrament or in the Eucharist. So this is really about meeting Jesus. And the Holy Spirit uses this sermon time, I think to shape us. And sometimes it's uncomfortable. And we receive the mind of Christ. And really, what a sermon is, it's something like an application of God's word to the spiritual needs of our particular situation here and now.

So when I do a sermon, I read the text and I ask myself – well no, I ask God, "What do you have to say to me in this text?" That's why I look for it first. Now, I have a whole coast of different ways, a whole intellectual apparatus – is that too fancy? I've studied a lot and I have lots of tools, and lots of skills to look into the text. But my one question is, "What are you saying to me, God?"

And then I ask a second question; "What are You saying to us?" So a sermon is grounded in scripture and centered on Jesus. I like what Stan Hauerwas says. I'm going to read this whole thing because it's a really great quote. He says, "As the church, we stand under the Word because we know we are told what otherwise we would not know in scripture."

We stand under the Word because we know we need to be told what to do. We stand under the Word because we do not believe – this is the shocking part of what he is saying – it's shocking to us here in our culture because we do not believe we have minds worth making up on our own. We come to this portion – actually to this service to shaped because we don't think we have the truth on our own.

That's why we come. That's what it is that we're doing. It's an expressed acknowledgment. We're going to, in a minute, acknowledge that we're always in the wrong whenever we're in front of God. We never get to stand in judgment over God. It's called a confession.

Okay, so that's what I think what we're doing in this part of the service. That's why I think that listening to a sermon, the worst thing you can do – but the most natural thing – is to sit and criticize what the preacher has to say. It's not because I say everything correctly – because I don't – and not everything I say is intelligent, or helpful but you are in the wrong spirit of sermon listening when it's critical.

There are some preachers who are so bad that you just have to say, "I give up." [Laughter] I'll admit that. You may have to give up on me. But here's something else I know as a preacher, you can tell what my sermon was about and it almost never is what I think it was about. So I have somebody come up to me, "Oh Pastor Myron, that bit that you said," sometimes I didn't even say it. But that's what you heard, "But man, that's exactly what I needed to hear, and you were talking about this –."

It's like, "I did not say that. I did not mean that." But hallelujah! Right? Because this is the time in which we create the space in our lives to hear from God. And God does some incredibly interesting things sometimes when we do that. Amen, how much of this sermon should I preach?

Okay, so what I've been doing is focusing on a particular strain of Old Testament readings because the lectionary works is it chooses things usually in groups. And so we had about eight weeks when we've been going through Jeremiah. We're towards the end of those eight weeks. But there's an eight-week stretch of Jeremiah and so he's a major prophet in the Old Testament, in the Hebrew bible. And so I've been focusing on that. And that was that text that you heard that was filled with a lot of big names, and weird – it's like this really almost forensic description of a legal transaction.

What's God saying in that? Well, that's what I'm supposed to listen for this morning. Here's the one thing I want you to take away from this – here's the one thing we take away from this; first of all, our ordinary lives as individuals, but also as us, as the gathered people of God here in this place, our ordinary lives are signs of God's grace in the world. The utterly, absolutely ordinary things that we do can be those signs. We could call them – here's a great phrase for you – "sacramental signs of hope."

What's a sacrament?

Speaker 2: Inaudible [00:09:38]

Myron Penner: Yeah! I like that.

Speaker 2: Inaudible [00:09:41]

Myron Penner: Oh, do they? Listen, he's like the star parishioner from a preacher's standpoint. Marcel's awesome. We often call them, "signs and seals" or "the means of grace." The way God

works His grace into our lives. I'm not going to go into it a whole lot more than that; whether there's two, or four, or five, or seven. Because we like, as Christians, to argue the most with the people who agree with us the most, right? That's what we do. There's a lot of jokes I could tell but we don't have the time to do that. But we'll just move on.

When I say sacramental, what I mean is that the ordinary things of our life, we have sacrament here and it's going to be bread and wine and those are just things that came from God's earth. But we believe that God is going to work in them in a very particular way. So something that's sacramental is when God shows up in the ordinary business of our lives. But our lives can be sacramental signs of hope in a world that lacks the human resources to meet that hope – the problems that we encounter.

What is going on in this text? It just seems like really – again, like this forensic legal account of what happened. The word of the Lord came to me, first of all, oh man, the word of the Lord came to me while I'm in jail. Notice that he's in jail because he's been speaking the word of the Lord and they want to stop him from doing that. But they can't hinder God's word coming to him even though he's in captivity.

So the word of the Lord comes to him and, "You're going to have your cousin show up. He's going to ask you to buy a field." What's really important about this is that the Babylonians have already occupied that territory outside of Jerusalem. And so his cousin has apparently fallen into hard times financially and can't make the payments on a piece of land. And according to Jewish law, the relative should buy it, pay off, and keep it in the family because that's really important in that culture. Right? Land is really important. You don't have it, you have nothing. So as a member of his family he was in a sense obligated to do that. And it was the legal thing to do. The problem is, this guy owns it according to a government that doesn't currently govern. Right?

It's like me selling you beachfront property in Three Hills Alberta. "Hey, I've got some great beachfront property in Three Hills Alberta. How about sight unseen, you pay me seven ounces of silver." That's what he paid. Seventeen ounces – well, seventeen shekels, seven ounces. I think it's seven ounces.

Anyway, it doesn't matter. The thing is, it was a significant amount of money for property. This is a ludicrous transaction. Why? Because the Babylonians were already surrounding Jerusalem. He was himself prophesying that they will overrun Jerusalem, and they own that piece of land. They occupy it. But this is another one of these lived parables. What does it mean when he goes and he buys a piece of property for which he has no reasonable expectation of ever occupying? What do you call that?

Speaker 3: I'd call it faith.

Myron Penner: Faith?

Speaker 4: Hope.

Myron Penner: Hope. A sacred sign of hope. Right? What are the three most important things in real estate?

Speaker 5: Location.

Myron Penner: Location, location, location. This was not the location. This was a bad purchase. And so what we have here is that Jeremiah's purchase, which was absurd and foolish, of this field in his hometown of Anathoth, this step of faith that Jerusalem would return to normal commercial and social life and so it became this sign that indicates that God's future was for His people.

I was going to tell you a story – I will tell it, about the Exxon Valdez. It's not the one you're thinking of, but when I was at university when the Exxon Valdez happened – I've realized just now, I just dated myself completely. Exxon Valdez? Everybody under my age, which I won't divulge – Exxon Valdez was a horrific oil spill just off the coast of Alaska in, I want to say, the late '80s? '90s? '88, there we go. And so it was like a symbol of a lot of bad things. The Exxon Valdez that I'm talking about is not that one. It was my best friend and roommate's car in the university that we called, the "Exxon Valdez," because very morning there was an oil spill outside of our house. It was a cutlass supreme. It was probably mid-'80s vintage, maybe even late '70s. Hard to tell, it was a mess, right?

And one day, the transmission – at that time, Corrie, I don't know if you remember Corrie, my friend, he was here earlier – it was his car. And he said, "Myron, I can't get my car. You're going to have to give me a push." So I got out and what was happening is his transmission was going. It was an automatic transmission and if I got the car going he could keep it going. And then one day, it just wouldn't do that at all. So I had a beater car as well, LTD Ford, similar vintage, didn't leak quite as much oil. And I got behind him and I literally pushed him with my car about 10 kilometers to where the scrap yard was and he got \$50 for it! And we went out to Earl's. It was awesome.

Then we were sitting at the stoplight and he's going like this out the window. I don't know what the people were thinking. I would come on and I would bang him with my car! Because I didn't care what happened to my car. And I'd have to keep banging him and he would get going. And he'd slow down and I'd bang him again. And I literally pushed him all the way down the highway. If he got going up a certain speed I could get up behind him and push him and he would coast for a while. So I just kept doing that; I'd come up behind him and hit him as lightly as possible but we got him to the yard.

I guess the point that I want to make is that Corrie gave up completely having to do the things or he gave up completely on doing the things one normally needs to do as a good car owner, to keep the car going like regular maintenance and repairs because he knew one day it's not going to run

anymore. It wasn't worth it. You see, he already made the judgment that it wasn't worthwhile because it just was not a good car. And eventually, he just completely gave up on the car and scrapped it.

Jeremiah's doing the opposite. He's been pronouncing woe and judgment upon Israel because of who they are and how they've been. And he's saying, "It's going to be nasty, guys! You're going to get run over by the Babylonians. But let me tell you that God has not given up. I haven't given up. There will be a future. I'm going to show you that by investing in something that appears to be worthless."

You see, we could invest, make those kinds of investments every day with our lives because we believe that God is reconciling the world to Himself in Jesus Christ. We don't give up. We don't go off and form our own little safe commune somewhere away from the world. We don't withdraw. We engage. We buy fields and we sell them. We make relationships and we invest in people that we have no reason on earth to invest in because people might think that they're worthless. They might think that there's no hope for that person. You're not going to get very much back from that investment.

But you see, our lives can be these sacramental signs of hope because God is reconciling the world to Himself in Jesus Christ. Let's pray.

Gracious God, we thank You for this grace that we've received in Jesus. We ask that we would live lives that scream that, that show that, that demonstrate that in everything that we say and that we do. We ask this in the name of Jesus, amen.