

Sweeping the Strangers and Outsiders in Your City: Luke's Rich Man, Lazarus,
Boundaries, and Houseless Humans in Portland.

Ron Clark, Portland Seminary/Agape Church of Christ
rclark@georgefox.edu

Introduction

Luke's story of the Rich Man and Lazarus was an attempt to teach a wealthy audience to show compassion for the poor, yet it was also a story concerning boundaries. The Rich Man would not cross boundaries to help Lazarus, therefore, in the end, Lazarus could not cross a divide to help his suffering tenant. Since ancient communities dwelt with the poor rather¹ than confining them to sections of the city, the boundaries were more than geographical.

While historically US urban communities separated the upper class from the poor through housing projects or gated communities, society is changing as houseless individuals live throughout the city. Due to the rising populations of the houseless, poverty becomes present in every neighborhood as more and more individuals sleep on the streets while tents continue to increase the formation of forced exilic communities within the city. Non-geographical "boundaries" continually hinder our work in Portland with houseless individuals as we attempt to integrate men, women, and children into the fabric of our society. As we have begun to partner with coalitions to develop camps, tiny homes, and provide services for those on the streets it has become evident that helping these individuals requires the support and acceptance of community members, who continue to separate themselves from "those poor people." The increase of houseless individuals due to declining housing resources and dislocation of over five-hundred in our Lazarean community, from Portland's Springwater Corridor (in 2017), has begun to create awareness of intense need within our community.

¹And through patronage tended to exploit these vulnerable individuals. Kuhn, *The Kingdom According to Luke and Acts*, 13-14.

Resistance from neighborhoods, law enforcement, service providers, and business owners has not only become a challenge but a barrier to "welcoming the stranger among us." Those who are "social refugees" not only struggle to find support from the community, but faith communities as well. Welcoming or accepting these individuals, families, and communities requires crossing boundaries of fear, judgment, and trust as we work to create communities where peace, safety, and justice exist for social exiles needing support and love. In this paper I intend to discuss methods we are using to develop relationships and help our community "cross" these emotional/spiritual boundaries to embrace Luke's empire of justice, peace, mercy, and *shalom*.

Luke's Story of the Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16: 19-31)

The Gospel According to Luke has been viewed as a narrative² of the life of Jesus that addresses marginalized individuals.³ While the narrative was addressed to a "Most Excellent Theophilus" debate continues whether the recipient was a wealthy individual or a Christian community.⁴ However, the narrative accounts (which include Acts) indicate that the reader was somewhat familiar with the Greek text of the Hebrew Bible, the prophets, the exile of Judah, a

²I use "narrative" for διηγησιν, which was a term used for advanced writing in the educational systems of the ancient world. For more see Bonz, *The Past as Legacy*, 93; Brawley, *Luke-Acts and the Jews*, 53; Cancik, "The History of Culture, Religion, and Institutions," 674; Clark, *Jesus Unleashed*, 25-26; Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 53; Malina and Pilch, *Social-Science Commentary*, 7; McDonald, *The Homeric Epics*, 5; Parsons, "Luke and the *Progymnasmata*," 40; *Luke*, 13-14; Pickett, "Luke and Empire," 5; Spencer, *Journeying Through Acts*, 14; Tyson, "From History to Rhetoric and Back," 41.

³For more on Luke and social justice see Clark, *Jesus Unleashed*, 41; *The Spirit of Jesus Unleashed*, 21, 23; Grassi, *Peace on Earth*, 37-39; Johnson, *Prophetic Jesus*, 94-102; Malina and Pilch, *Social-Science Commentary*, 21.

⁴Since the name "Theophilus" means "lover of God," there have been individuals who have suggested that this was a term used for a community. Those suggesting that this was an individual indicate that "Most Excellent," (κρατιστε) was also used for the Governor Felix (Acts 23:26) indicating that Theophilus was a wealthy Roman official. See Clark, *Jesus Unleashed*, 29; Robinson and Wall, *Called to Be Church*, 19. Shepherd and Moxnes indicate that κρατιστε was also used of the Equestrian unit in the Roman army; Shepherd, *The Narrative Function of the Holy Spirit*, 103; Moxnes, "Patron Client Relations," 267.

basic story of Jesus and the Christian community, and a wealthier lifestyle.⁵ Luke also shares more accounts with the poor, gentiles, Samaritans, females, and those with physical ailments as compared to the other Gospel writers.

I believe that the Lucan Gospel and Acts are narratives, by the early writer, to convince the recipient known as “most excellent Theophilus,”⁶ of the validity of a “Jesus movement,” also known as the disciples of Christ. The narrative⁷ suggests that Jesus’ kingdom agenda was to reach those marginalized by not only the Roman Empire, but the client rulers who served the Roman government.⁸

This narrative agenda develops in the early introduction of Luke 1-2 as the insignificant virgin Mary offers a song of resistance (Luke 1:46-56),⁹ with the announcement to common shepherds (2:8-20), Simeon’s prophecy concerning the gentiles (2:32), and the widow Anna’s comfort at seeing the child (2:36-38). For the Lucan writer Jesus’ ministry was announced at the Nazareth synagogue (4:16-19) as Jesus reinterpreted Is. 61:1-2 through his ministry to the marginalized.¹⁰ The Nazareth sermon was fulfilled as Jesus touched a man with leprosy (5:12-

⁵Clark, *Jesus Unleashed*, 23-29; Kuhn, 57.

⁶Since the name “Theophilus” means “lover of God,” there have been individuals who have suggested that this was a term used for a community. Those suggesting that this was an individual indicate that “Most Excellent,” (κρατιστε) was also used for the Governor Felix (Acts 23:26) indicating that Theophilus was a wealthy Roman official. See Clark, *Jesus Unleashed*, 29; Robinson and Wall, *Called to Be Church*, 19. Shepherd and Moxnes indicate that κρατιστε was also used of the Equestrian unit in the Roman army; Shepherd, *The Narrative Function of the Holy Spirit*, 103; Moxnes, “Patron Client Relations,” 267.

⁷I use “narrative” for διηγησιν, which was a term used for advanced writing in the educational systems of the ancient world. For more see Bonz, *The Past as Legacy*, 93; Brawley, *Luke-Acts and the Jews*, 53; Cancik, “The History of Culture, Religion, and Institutions,” 674; Clark, *Jesus Unleashed*, 25-26; Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 53; Malina and Pilch, *Social-Science Commentary*, 7; McDonald, *The Homeric Epics*, 5; Parsons, “Luke and the *Progymnasmata*,” 40; Luke, 13-14; Pickett, “Luke and Empire,” 5; Spencer, *Journeying Through Acts*, 14; Tyson, “From History to Rhetoric and Back,” 41.

⁸Anthony J. Saldarini. *Pharisees, Scribes, and Sadducees in Palestinian Society*, xiii, 41.

⁹Warren Carter, “Singing in the Reign,” 84-106.

¹⁰Jesus, while reading the Isaiah 61 text, inserts the phrase αποστειλαι τεθρασμενους εν αφεσει (he sent me to free those who have been oppressed) suggesting his healing ministry to the oppressed was a sign of the “year of the Lord’s favor.” The LXX reads ιασασθαι τοθς σθνητετριμμενοθς τε καρδια for MT לְהַבְרִישׁ לְגַוְיָרִיִּלְבּ לְהַקְדִּישׁ לַיהוָה. Brawley also suggest that Luke structures the rejection at Nazareth to contrast the Matthean and Marcan accounts. Brawley, *Luke-Acts and the Jews*, 11.

14), ate with *sinners and tax collectors* (5:27-32),¹¹ descended to teach the poor on the plain (6:17-49),¹² shared the disappointing news with John's disciples that his ministry was that of the one to come (7:18-23),¹³ and forgave a woman/prostitute who kissed and wiped his feet (7:36-50).

Before the transfiguration (a high point in both the Matthean and Marcan accounts) and the journey to Jerusalem (9:51),¹⁴ Jesus reminded his followers that discipleship not only required “daily carrying one’s cross,” but “not being ashamed of me and my words” (9:23-27). As Jesus sought to reach marginalized individuals the realization that this mission not only encouraged resistance but brought “shame” to his followers is well understood in a context where client rulers sought political favors, power, social recognition, and hoarded resources from those on the margins.¹⁵ This shame or resistance would also be understood if the author was writing his work to a wealthy patron (most excellent Theophilus) who would have felt uncomfortable with a Messiah born in a feed trough,¹⁶ touching those with highly communicable diseases, living among the poor, and speaking negatively against the wealthy and upper class,

¹¹The Lucan account indicates that Jesus gathered with “tax collectors and others (*αλλος*)” while the Pharisees accused him of associating with “tax collectors and sinners (*αμαρτανιος*).” “It is the Pharisees who introduced the term ‘sinners,’ using it as a label. In the hands of the Pharisees, ‘sinners’ demarcate those who associate with toll collectors as persons living outside the faithfulness of God. By means of vituperative apposition, then, toll collectors are dismissed, along with sinners, as possible friends; from the Pharisaic perspective, they are outside the boundaries, beyond the margins. In Lukan parlance, though, toll collectors and sinners would be included among ‘the poor,’ those to whom Jesus has been sent to proclaim good news.” Adams, *The Sinner in Luke*, lix.

¹²Key differences between the Lucan “Sermon on the Plain” and the Matthean “Sermon on the Mount” reflect that Jesus “descended” to the people rather than the people “ascending to Jesus.” In Luke Jesus simply states “blessed are you, poor...” while “lifting his eyes” toward the disciples. The author seems to locate Jesus “below” or “among the masses.”

¹³The disciples of John the Baptist interrupted Jesus’ ministry/work of healing to the oppressed (evident by Luke’s “at that time Jesus cured...εν εκεινε τε ωρα εθεραπευσεν...”) to question his authority or abilities to be the Messiah. Jesus ended his response with “blessed is the one who is not offended by me/mine,” (*και μακαριος εστιν ως εαν με σκανδαλισθη εν εμοι*). *Εν εμοι*, pronoun personal plural—by mine, in mine suggesting that the offense involves who/what Jesus possessed.

¹⁴Clark, *Jesus Unleashed*, 41, 109; Grassi, 117-26; Morgan, *Encountering Images of Spiritual Transformation*, 23-29; Resseguie, *Spiritual Landscapes*, 29.

¹⁵Horsely, *Covenant Economics*, 4-5.

¹⁶Kuhn, 16.

while claiming to be Lord, Savior, and Redeemer. The Lucan author's skill as a writer also suggests that he may have been familiar with the upper class, yet offers the opportunity for the reader to encounter Jesus, as he had, and find an appropriate response.

How can the wealthy, who may not be corrupt, participate in this new Empire? Is there hope for those who have submitted under the thumb of Roman oppression while themselves oppressing those in their community? Is it possible to live in comfort and luxury while following a radical Messiah who was a friend of the untouchables, lived in poverty, and told stories that championed the poor and oppressed?

There was this rich guy¹⁷ who was clothed in bright purple and linen and who feasted every day.¹⁸ At his gate was thrown/cast¹⁹ a certain poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores/wounds,²⁰ who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table, even the dogs came and licked his sores. The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's chest. The rich man died and was buried. In Hades, while being tortured, he looked up and observed Abraham in the distance with Lazarus in his chest. He cried out, "Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water to cool my tongue, for these flames are killing me!" But Abraham said, "Child, remember that you received your good things while living, and Lazarus received bad things. Besides all this, between us is a great chasm so that those who wanted to cross from here to you may not be able and none may cross from there to us." He said, "Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father's house—for I have five brothers—so that he may warn them, so that they don't come to this tortured place." But Abraham said, "They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them." He said, "No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they

¹⁷“ἄνθρωπος τις, ‘a certain person,’ occurs in the NT only in Luke's writing. It appears in the introduction of...seven of the Lukan parables (12:16; 14:16; 15:11; 16:1; 19:12) and two miracle stories (14:2; Acts 9:33).” John Nolland, *Luke 1-9:20*, 592.

¹⁸ λαμπρῶς is an adverb—bright, shining, probably not faded. I would like to suggest that this represents “new clothes” that were not faded by washing repeatedly. Clothed...from ενδύω or ενδιδύσκω, 3 person, sing, imperf, middle. This suggests that the rich man “clothed himself” rather than “was clothed by others.” Purple and linen were signs of royalty (Prov. 31:22; Rev. 18:12).

¹⁹Εβεβλητω to the gate, 3 per sing pluperf pass of βαλλω to lay, cast, place.

²⁰The man was also covered with sores or bruises (ελκομενος, participle of ελκωω, sores or also physical blows/bruises). Dogs licking bruises or sores was viewed as a way to promote healing in the ancient world.

will repent.” He said to him, “If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, one who rose from the dead will not persuade them.”

The parable reflects Jesus/Luke’s typical style of *divine reversal*.²¹ “Jesus’ words both appeal to popular notions of an eschatological reversal of fortunes and provide social commentary on the inequities and injustices of the social and economic systems of his day. Yet the resources to resolve such inequities are already in the possession of Jesus’s (and Luke’s) hearers, a point made in the second half of the parable.”²² In a society where those with wealth were given status they were also named—because “they mattered.” Yet, in this story the wealthy man is not named while the poor man is.

The parable also discussed boundaries. In ancient cities the poor lived in the same areas as the wealthy and upperclass homes.²³ Unlike modern cities where those who cannot afford to live in wealthier apartments or homes are confined to camps, projects, or lower income neighborhoods, apartment complexes, trailer courts; all classes of people lived together. In Luke’s day the poor were scattered through town, typically located at the gates of those with money. The rich would have to walk by the poor any time they left their homes and either give alms or ignore them. In some cases they would offer to serve as a patron to both help and exploit those in need.

While this story has been used to discuss levels or locations of hell, the judgment, or the identity of “Abraham,” these interpretations avoid the basic themes of Luke’s narrative. The story involves boundaries, relationships, and judgment. *First, boundaries are evident as people are prevented from crossing them to offer help.* The text indicated that Lazarus had been cast

²¹Clark, *Jesus Unleashed*, 154-55; Grassi, *Peace on Earth*, 117-26; Kuhn, 74-75; Parsons, *Luke*, 250-51

²²Parsons, *Luke*, 250.

²³Clark, *Jesus Unleashed*, 154.

down at the rich man's gate.²⁴ This could have been by force (he was attacked and left at the gate) or he may have been carried by someone/others and placed at the gate of this wealthy home (possibly expecting mercy). The reason he was present was not important--Lazarus was hovering at the gate. He was present and available for mercy, or as Jesus states, "the poor will always be among us, and we can help them any time we want..." (Mark 14:7)..

In ancient homes the front door was many times open and one could see into the dining room. In this story Lazarus longed to eat crumbs from the table, suggesting that he could see the table and dinner from where he hovered. Yet he was not welcomed into the man's home. In the afterlife, the rich man could not cross boundaries to Lazarus nor could Lazarus cross them to help the suffering man. Because the rich man refused to cross boundaries, while alive, to offer mercy; in the divine reversal those with compassion and mercy cannot as well. Might we suggest that the Rich Man created an emotional chasm during his life?

Second, the story called for mercy. The rich man refused to show mercy. The only merciful ones in the story were the dogs. In the ancient world dogs would lick wounds or around them which was thought to promote healing. This was common near Asklepios.²⁵ In the "afterlife" Lazarus was not allowed to show mercy toward the rich man while in torment. Mercy would not even be shown the living family of the suffering man, because it was not shown to Lazarus.

Third, the story discussed comfort. One man received comfort, praise, and honor while on earth. In the end this honor was reversed and the one suffering received comfort. As Jesus mentioned in the Sermon on the Plain (Luke 6), those who were currently fed had already

²⁴The man may have been badly beaten and left at the door or covered with sores and brought to the rich man's home.

²⁵Clark, *The Spirit of Jesus Unleashed on the Church*, 24. Dogs licked sores but also "licked around" bruises or injuries.

received their comfort while those who hungered would one day be fed. This divine reversal was the work of God. Those who received joy in this life, to the neglect of others, would be neglected at the judgment. The rich man remained nameless, without status, and without honor, as did the other “certain rich men” in Lucan parables. In the end Lazarus was in the arms of Abraham and received comfort.

Finally, the story suggested that Torah and the Prophets called God’s people to show mercy to others. While Mikael Parsons, and others, have suggested a similarity of this parable to other Jewish and Egyptian tales of a rich man and poor man in the afterlife, the characters were able to return to warn the living (similar to Jacob Marley in Charles Dickens’ *Christmas Carol*). However, in the Lucan parable Abraham (or Jesus) claimed that there was no need to return, the people have access to the scriptures, something read weekly in the assembly, which offered ample information concerning treatment of the poor. Luke’s audience was again being challenged to care for those on the margins of society. This story was a clear condemnation to those who attended worship, listened to Torah and the Prophets, and ignored others who were suffering in society.

Boundaries, Poverty, and Mercy

Similar to Luke’s time period, the poor do live among us today. The United States of America has developed a more intricate system of “suburbs” where those financially stable can leave the crowded city center to the outlying areas with more land, space between homes, individualized cul de sac’s, and the ability to drive greater distances by owning an automobile.²⁶ This has helped to create a distance between the city and suburbs.

Harvey Conn and Manuel Ortiz suggest that in ancient times evil/chaos was confined

²⁶Faig, *Extending the Table*, 2-3.

outside the city walls.²⁷ The city became the location of safety, protection, spirituality, and government order and structure. The walls separated the surrounding countryside keeping evil and chaos at a distance. Today, however, it has been suggested that evil dwells in the heart of the city. “Inner City” has become a term that suggests crime, homelessness, drug dealing and addiction, prostitution, and other behaviors considered to be “public ills.” As Don Mitchell wrote, the inner city and its public space became the location of anarchy. “Public space engenders fears, fears that derive from the sense of public space as uncontrolled space, as a space in which civilization is exceptionally fragile.”²⁸ Restraint, control, and order become important responses to this perceived chaos. “Who has the rights to public space” is a common question asked within the city.

During the Post WWII era and with the creation of “suburbs,” families were drawn out of the “inner city” to escape overcrowding, crime, and social ills. This was later called *Urban Flight*. The American Dream, an ideal that supposedly offered everyone equal access to an automobile, house, job, and family security in a safe/quiet neighborhood was expressed as the “ideal life.” As the nation prospered suburbs grew, keeping those who could not afford the American Dream confined to the crowded cities. Those who could “afford the American Dream” as had a sense of status versus those who could not afford or, as supposed by some, refused to pay for this dream. The haves and have nots were distinguished between those with a voice and vote and those without.

“In short, owning a home has been part of the American Dream and symbolizes freedom, security, mobility, and community. Despite a lack of evidence, we equate the behavior of buying a home with a number of positive behaviors and values, and the behavior of losing a place to live with negative behaviors and values.”²⁹

²⁷Conn and Ortiz, *Urban Ministry*, 91.

²⁸Mitchell, *The Right to the City*, 13.

²⁹Stivers, 46.

However, a trend began in America during the 1970s as the population returned to “reclaim” urban areas through growth, industrial transformation, and the reversal of declining urban populations.³⁰ With the recent move to “take back the cities,” thousands, and possibly millions, of men, women, and children have been literally “displaced” slowly through the gentrification of neighborhoods. “Gentrification, the “process of renewal and rebuilding accompanying the influx of middle-class or affluent people into deteriorating areas that often displaces poorer residents,” has led to an exodus of the city’s poorer residents to inner-ring suburbs leaving these communities to grapple with some of the same issues that they faced decades earlier.

It is clear that re-urbanization is transforming once again the relationship between the urban and suburban corridors of major metropolitan areas.”³¹ The destruction and building of new housing and apartment units has encouraged the increase in rent driving businesses, families with limited incomes, and individuals who struggle to survive on minimum wage incomes; outside where they once called home. With the design of suburbs for automobile transportation, higher prices, and longer distance from human services; families moving to the suburbs found it equally as hard to survive.

With the majority of resources that addressed lower income and houseless individuals located in the inner cities, those without access to transportation have been displaced in the search for affordable housing or forced to stay put and pay the increasing rent. The houseless have little options but to “camp” or live on the streets.

³⁰Conn and Ortiz, 54-55; Duany, Plater-Zyberk, and Speck, 9; Keller, *Center Church*, 155.

³¹Faig, 10.

As urban areas continue to grow, competition for limited and affordable housing has become a major issue facing those trying to survive. While Millennials will struggle to live in the cities rather than the suburbs, those who are poor will inevitably lose in a competition for housing. As Barbara Ehrenreich wrote:

When the rich and the poor compete for housing on the open market, the poor don't stand a chance. The rich can always outbid them, buy up their tenements or trailer parks, and replace them with condos, McMansions, golf courses, or whatever they like. Since the rich have become more numerous, thanks largely to rising stock prices and executive salaries, the poor have necessarily been forced into housing that is more expensive, more dilapidated, or more distant from their places of work.³²

The Stranger in Exile Among Us

The houseless who live within urban areas will continue to grow as competition for affordable housing increases. Thus, the American Dream, offering access to all for affordable housing, becomes impossible for some; leaving them without resources or a place in society.³³ Stivers has also written that the issue of poverty involves individual's judgmental attitude toward the poor. The poor and lower class have been viewed as those in need of reform, discipline, or a better moral code.³⁴

In addition to this, many in the faith community, especially the Conservative Fundamentalist movements, have sided with the American Dream at the expense of the poor. The lack of empathy, believing that God favors the rich, and supporting the American

³²Ehrenreich, *Nickel and Dimed*, 199.

³³"Those who have actually experienced poverty in their lifetimes are better equipped to cope than those who have not. For the first time in decades, the American dream for millions has turned into a nightmare, leaving them shattered and struggling to survive. A nation that now has the blues must learn from a blues people or it may not endure." Smalley, 127. Stivers, 10, 41. "In the past homeless were bums, vagabonds. Now they are families, addiction, mental illness, abused. Poverty has also been feminized," 52.

³⁴"In examining the issue of homelessness, the starting point should not be the middle-class, white homeowners but the numerous people of low or no income...Homelessness is clearly linked to structural factors, namely a lack of affordable housing, poverty, and oppression. We have a political economy without enough jobs for everyone, and too many jobs with inadequate pay and benefits." *Ibid.*, 57.

nationalistic view that the US is superior and chosen by God, further creates an ideology of economic oppression for those who “don’t fit the Made in America mold.”³⁵ Boundaries are created due to a belief that the American Dream is attainable through hard work, opportunity, and equal opportunities. Yet these issues still plague communities.

First, *basic human rights for all those living in the city seem to be overlooked by those who “own” property.*³⁶ When a society blames those in poverty and who are vulnerable for their state of being, the oppressed have little power to change their circumstances. This society also *removes their voice, basic human rights, and power to advocate for themselves and for change.* They are forced to accept who they are, where they live, and how those with privilege can treat them.

Second, those who inhabit the cities and are houseless *do not carry a voice or find it difficult to vote, since they do not own property.*³⁷ Public space, which should offer a voice for all, becomes a voice for those who solicit businesses, pay taxes, and cooperate with the system. Advocating for the poor offers a voice and unites with them in seeking basic human rights, services, and compassion. Finally, *acknowledging that the poor are poor because of a system that is not fair requires all of us to confront this injustice.*³⁸

The Village Coalition: A Response

As a minister I not only work academically through the various issues we face in Portland, but personally as an advocate for those who are part of the church where I serve.

³⁵Conn and Ortiz, 100; Ehrenreich, 6-7; Smalley, 909.

³⁶“ The right to have basic services should trump the right to property or public space.” Mitchell, 7, 20-21.

³⁷Mitchell, 9.

³⁸Conn and Ortiz, 110; Stivers, 7. “Key for the Christian is recognizing how our constructed ideologies can justify oppression and violence.”

Portland's houseless crisis has not only drawn the attention of city leaders, businesses, and home owners; it has drawn support from many advocates, houseless, and care providers who are determined to directly address this community issue. The Village Coalition, of which I am a part, has developed teams that are working together to solve the houseless crisis through the establishment of communities by designing tiny houses (PODS), wrapping services around these new communities, while both encouraging and supporting the efforts of the villagers to govern themselves. The Coalition includes architecture professors and students from Portland State University, housing advocates, those living in camps or on the streets, the formerly houseless, addiction recovery providers, and now faith-based leaders. The goals of the coalition are:

1. Identify houselessness as a systemic issue and provide for individuals
2. Reemphasize the right to have adequate housing and community.
3. Supply resources through agencies, community, and involvement.
4. Bringing the community and individuals together to solve the crisis.
5. Self-government is the right of all communities.
6. Engaging Faith Communities will provide resources and partner with agencies.

The coalition has also developed teams that work together to guide and develop these communities while bridging the gap between housed neighborhoods, businesses, and congregations. The various teams educate community members through opportunities, while working in the community, are facing both resistance and support. Resistance has come from various entities but the major issue they face concerns boundaries. Homeowners, business owners, and neighborhoods seek clear boundaries to separate the houseless from "the housed."

Many of the discussions we have, that are negative, resist a "welcoming" presence due to the fear of strangers, assumptions that the houseless live with addictions, or choose to avoid employment and paying rent. "Anxiety, confusion, and avoidance is a response to self and society when we see beggars and not know whether to give or not... We fear to be family to the

poor because we fear becoming poor. And yet, many of us also fear that refusing to be family to the poor is refusing membership in the body of Christ, which is the greatest danger of all.”³⁹

While the Coalition offers opportunity to educate the public, there is a level of fear, anxiety, and distaste for those living on the streets. As Bouma-Prediger and Walsh stated, “homelessness strips homeless people of boundaries.”⁴⁰ While those with homes have the privilege of setting boundaries, those without them do not. Lazarus hovers, hoping for mercy.

Ministry: Blending Responses to Welcoming the Stranger

The parable of the “certain rich man” and Lazarus provides a powerful narrative for practical theologians, ministry leaders, and faith-based advocates seeking to strengthen the faith community’s response to houselessness.

First, *the parable is a narrative suggesting that hospitality/welcoming the stranger, is a command of God.* The warning to hear “Moses and the Prophets” was a reminder to the Jewish audience that the sacred texts were clear on how God’s people are to treat the “stranger at our gate.” Additionally the refusal to acknowledge the suffering of Lazarus, offer relief, or provide food for one who was “present” at the home lead to the rich man’s punishment in the afterlife. The parable indicates that if we do not show mercy, if we do not offer relationship, and if we create boundaries with the poor—in the end there will be no mercy, no relationship, and no comfort for the rest of us. This Lucan parable calls the faith community to seriously reconsider how we emotionally and physically connect with the Lazarean community among us. It also invites those of us, struggling to find ways to offer mercy, to understand the value of relationship and providing “dignity” to the one “hovering” at our gate.

³⁹Johnson, *Fear of Beggars*, 2, 5.

⁴⁰Bouma-Prediger and Walsh, 46.

Second, *the development of the American Dream continues to further marginalize and oppress those who struggle in poverty.* The houseless exist because adequate and affordable housing do not exist. The poor constantly compete for limited resources with those who financially have the means to pay the increasing rents in our communities. The declining middle-class struggle not because they choose to, but because they have to in order to survive. The United States, as well as North America and the rest of the world, experience increasing numbers of houselessness and poverty because those in power control much of the resources in community. The Lucan Jesus calls the “certain rich person” to welcome Lazarus and “do good” by removing earthly chasms.

Unfortunately, many congregations practice policies similar to our communities. When one considers the type of buildings most congregations inhabit, how gatherings respond when a houseless person attends worship, or the “dress codes” practiced in assemblies, it is easy to understand how similar our faith communities are to our secular neighborhoods.

Practical Theology offers ministers and leaders an adequate opportunity to encourage congregants to understand the message of Jesus through the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. First, *congregations must open our arms to the houseless not just in our neighborhoods, but our community at large.* Welcoming the stranger suggests that we acknowledge first the Lazarean community at our gate or in our presence. We must reach across the earthly divide. We must not be content that Lazarus can only hope for a meal and we must not let “the dogs be more merciful” than we are.

Second, *our calling is to also be a witness to our neighborhood.* If Lazarus or the rich man returned to his family, what would they have said? We have the opportunity to proclaim the

message of Moses and the Prophets, to a people creating boundaries and withholding mercy intentionally or unintentionally.

Finally, our work in villages has illustrated to us that the houseless simply want to be recognized as humans, capable of caring for themselves and others. *Houselessness is not simply a choice, it is a choosing of what seems to be the best option one has.* Ministries of compassion and mercy, while not always cost effective, are holy and worthy of our faith communities' support.

Confronting the System and Showing Mercy

Luke's Rich Man and Lazarus still offers a modern solution to the issues we face in Portland with houseless individuals and those exiling them from their neighborhoods. The Villages offer hope for those on the streets as well as those in their homes. This hope suggests that we cross our self-made boundaries to help those without boundaries. Stivers indicates that this is building "just and compassionate societies in solidarity with the homeless and poor, not on behalf of the poor."⁴¹ We also believe that villages empower those who are houseless to lead their own community, while those in homes are learning to also become community. This group is reaching out to bring both groups together, crossing boundaries, understanding, and welcoming each other. Stivers suggested that crossing boundaries is not only important for the homeowner, it is important for the one dwelling on the streets.⁴² This is a community and an opportunity to

⁴¹Stivers, 8.

⁴²A social movement against poverty and in support of redistribution of wealth and power is necessary if we are going to be successful at preventing homelessness and ensuring decent affordable housing for all. This happens through, 1) Listening to the homeless in our community, 2) educating congregations, 3) volunteering in homeless communities, 4) joining local coalitions, 5) advocating for state and national policies, and 6) standing in solidarity with workers. Ibid., 128.

cross boundaries before we find a time when the vulnerable refuse to cross over to offer us support, healing, and love.

Bibliography

Adams, Dwayne, H.. *The Sinner in Luke*. Eugene: Pickwick, 2008.

Bonz, Marianne Palmer. *The Past as Legacy: Luke-Acts and Ancient Epic*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 2000.

Bouma-Prediger, Steven and Brian J Walsh. *Beyond Homelessness: Christian Faith in a Culture of Displacement*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2008.

Brawley, Robert L. *Luke-Acts and the Jews: Conflict, Apology, and Conciliation*. Atlanta: Scholars, 1987.

Cahill, Lisa Sowle. *Family: A Christian Social Perspective*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, Publishers, 2000.

Cancik, Hubert. "The History of Culture, Religion, and Institutions in Ancient Historiography: Philological Considerations Concerning Luke's History." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 116:4 (1997) 673 – 95.

Clark, Ron. *Jesus Unleashed: Luke's Gospel for Emerging Christians*. Eugene: Cascade, 2013.

_____. *The Spirit of Jesus Unleashed on the Early Church: Acts of the Early Christians in a Changing Culture*. Eugene: Cascade, 2016.

Conn, Harvey M., and Manuel Ortiz. *Urban Ministry: the Kingdom, the City, and the People of God*. IVP Downer's Grove, 2001.

Conner, Benjamin T. *Practicing Witness: A Missional Vision of Christian Practices*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2011.

Das, Verbs, ed. *Remaking a World* .

Ehrenreich, Barbara. *Bright-Sided: How the Relentless Promotion of Positive Thinking Has Undermined America*. NY: MetropolitanBooks, 2009.

_____. *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting by in America* (NY: Holt, 2001 but forward is 2008).

Faig, Phillip Vaden. *Extending the Table: A Strategic Guide of Missional Renewal for A Declining Congregation*. Dissertation Submitted to George Fox Evangelical Seminary. October 2016.

Grassi, Joseph. *Peace on Earth: Roots and Practices from Luke's Gospel*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2004

Halter, Hugh. *Sacrilege: Finding Life in the Unorthodox Ways of Jesus*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, a division of Baker Publishing Group, 2011.

Hatmaker, Brandon, on Hatmaker, and Ed Stetzer. *Barefoot Church: Serving the Least in a Consumer Culture*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011.

Johnson, Luke Timothy. *Prophetic Jesus, Prophetic Church*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011.

_____. *The Acts of the Apostles*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1992.

Johnson, S and Kelly S. Johnson. *The Fear of Beggars: Stewardship and Poverty in Christian Ethics*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, William B. Publishing Company, 2007.

Keller, Timothy. *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012.

Krattenmaker, Tom. *The Evangelicals You Don't Know: Introducing the Next Generation of Christians*. New York, NY, United States: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2013.

Kuhn, Karl Allen. *The Kingdom According to Luke and Acts: A Social, Literary, and Theological Introduction*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2015.

MacDonald, Dennis R. *The Homeric Epics and the Gospel of Mark*. New Haven: Yale, 2000.

Malina, Bruce J. and Jerome H. Neyrey. "Conflict in Luke – Acts: Labeling and Deviance Theory." *The Social World of Luke – Acts: Models for Interpretation*, edited by Jerome H. Neyrey, 97 – 122. Peabody: Hendrickson, 1991.

Malina, Bruce J. and John J. Pilch. *Social-Science Commentary on the Book of Acts*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008.

Meyer, Marshall T. *You Are My Witness: The Living Words of Rabbi Marshall T. Meyer*. Edited by Jane Isay. New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 2004.

Mitchell, Don. *The Right to the City: Social Justice and the Fight for Public Space*. New York: Guilford Publications, 2003.

Morgan, James M.. *Encountering Images of Spiritual Transformation: The Thoroughfare Motif within the Plot of Luke – Acts*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2013.

Moxnes, Halvor. "Patron-Client Relations and the New Community in Luke-Acts," 241-68. *The Social World of Luke-Acts: Models for Interpretation*, Jerome H. Neyrey, Ed. Peabody: Hendrickson, 1991.

Nolland, John. *Word Biblical Commentary: Luke 9:21-18:34*. Dallas: Word, 1993.

Parsons, Mikeal C. "Luke and the Progymnasmata: A Preliminary Investigation into the Preliminary Exercises." *Contextualizing Acts: Lukan Narrative and Greco-Roman Discourse*, editd by Todd Penner and Coroline Vander Stichele, 43 –63. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003.

- _____. *Luke: Storyteller, Interpreter, Evangelist*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007.
- Pickett, Raymond "Luke and Empire: An Introduction." *Luke-Acts and Empire: Essays in Honor of Robert L. Brawley*, edited by David Rhoads, David Esterline, and Jae Won Lee, 84 - 106. Eugene: Pickwick, 2011.
- Rauschenbusch, Walter. *A Theology for the Social Gospel*. United States: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1996.
- Resseguie, James L. *Spiritual Landscape: Images of the Spiritual Life in the Gospel of Luke*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004.
- Reynolds, Thomas E. *Vulnerable Communion: A Theology of Disability and Hospitality*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, Div of Baker Publishing Group, 2008.
- Roberts, Bob. *Transformation: Discipleship That Turns Lives, Churches, and the World Upside down*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010.
- Robinson, Anthony B. and Robert W. Wall. *Called to Be Church: The Book of Acts for a New Day*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006.
- Shepherd, Jr. William H. *The Narrative Function of the Holy Spirit as a Character in Luke-Acts*. Atlanta: Scholars, 1994.
- Stivers, Laura. *Disrupting Homelessness: Alternative Christian Approaches*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011.
- Spencer, F. Scott. *Journeying through Acts: A Literary-Cultural Reading*. Peabody: Hendrickson, 2004.
- Greg Toppo and Paul Overberg, "In Latest Census Figures, Cities Continue Growing," *USA Today Online*, October 7, 2014, accessed May 31, 2016, <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/usanow/2014/05/22/census-cities-population-growth/9377901/>.
- Tyson, Joseph B. "From History to Rhetoric and Back: Assessing New Trends in Acts Studies." *Contextualizing Acts: Lucan Narrative and Greco – Roman Discourse*, edited by Todd Penner and Caroline Vander Stichele, 23 – 42. Atlanta: SBL, 2003.
- Volf, Miroslav. *A Public Faith: How Followers of Christ Should Serve the Common Good*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, Div of Baker Publishing Group, 2011.
- Wells, David F. and Wells. *Losing Our Virtue: Why the Church Must Recover Its Moral Vision*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, William B. Publishing Company, 2002.
- Wright, Talmadge. *Out of Place: Homeless Mobilizations, Subcities, and Contested Landscapes*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997.