

*Creating Balance* – based on Luke 16:19-31  
Aspen Community UMC  
September 30, 2007

Page 1 of 7

What parable would make a man with two doctoral degrees  
one in theology one in philosophy, go on to get a third doctoral degree, this time in medicine,  
and then leave civilization as he knew it

with all of its culture and comforts, and depart for the jungles of Africa?

What parable could induce a man who was recognized  
as one of the best concert organists and experts on Bach in all of Europe  
go to a place where there were no organs to play?

What parable would so intensely motivate a man  
that he would give up a teaching position in Vienna  
to go live and work with people who lived in a primitive culture  
still governed by superstition in how they lived their lives?

The parable is the “Rich Man and Lazarus,”<sup>1</sup>

And the person is - who am I talking about?

I am told that in 1949 (I believe on July 9) he spoke in this very church  
perhaps at one of these lecterns.

Albert Schweitzer. Who knows the story?

In those early years when Walter and Elizabeth Paepke were following their vision  
of what would become the Aspen Music Festival and the Aspen Institute,  
and through their resources and their relationships,  
they were able to convince Dr. Schweitzer to leave Africa  
and come to Chicago and Aspen.

I understand they downplayed the three-day train ride from Chicago to Aspen  
leaving Dr. Schweitzer to think that Aspen was a suburb of Chicago.

And, why do I mention it to you?

Because Albert Schweitzer understood a fundamental principle expressed in this parable -  
that we are to be aware of and pay attention to the imbalances

---

<sup>1</sup> Christian History Institute. <http://chi.gospelcom.net/DAILYF/2002/07/daily-07-21-2002.shtml> as adapted by Brett Blair

*Creating Balance* – based on Luke 16:19-31  
Aspen Community UMC  
September 30, 2007

Page 2 of 7

in economics, in justice, and in health that occur in life on this earth –  
that we need to act in such a way that we recreate balance when and where we can.

When we work to create balance,  
we participate in a creative process that lures us, pulls us, enables us  
to live into something we have always heard about,  
something we have read about over and over  
that illusive phenomena – the kingdom of God.

I invite you now, to consider the parable,  
to consider Dr. Schweitzer,  
and consider what he said to us when he was here.  
And, in doing that, see if the parable  
the Rich Man and Lazarus, has something for us today.

Parables are a big part of what is recorded of the words of Jesus.  
Schweitzer was a theologian who sought after the historical Jesus,  
what we could learn about Jesus from history.  
We think that for the most part, the parables are the authentic words of Jesus  
although it was not a genre that he created. They go back a long time.  
No part of the gospels can better put us into touch  
with the mind of Jesus.  
The purpose of a parable is to strike the imagination,  
to pique the curiosity,  
to cause you and me to work in order to arrive at the meaning,  
but only so that the lesson will be more deeply engraved on the mind. <sup>1</sup>

This parable of the rich man and Lazarus  
must have been deeply engraved in Albert Schweitzer's mind.

*Creating Balance* – based on Luke 16:19-31  
Aspen Community UMC  
September 30, 2007

Page 3 of 7

What if it becomes engraved in our minds?

And, if it is deeply engraved in our minds, and we really comprehend it,

will it help empower us – in our surroundings here – where we are?

Will it help us step in faith and trust into a bigger vision?

Walter and Elizabeth Paepke had a big vision, and they knew that  
Albert Schweitzer understood something about it, and that is why they invited him.

So, what would Albert say to us now?

Would he tell us how the parable influenced his life?

Let's overhear some of the words in the speech given by  
the Chair of the Nobel Committee in 1953 on his behalf  
for the 1952 Nobel Peace Prize.

He was not present – he was back in Africa.

I paraphrase from the speech:

From the time he was a young man -

There was a sense of oneness with his fellow beings,  
And a compulsion to inquire into the meaning and purpose of existence,  
there was his family's influence - one of tolerance, rational thinking,  
and compassion. He grew up in the cultural environment of the Enlightenment.

There was a voice within him that gave him no peace,  
and kept asking him if he was simply to enjoy his happy life as a matter of course?

He contrasted his happiness with the suffering he saw in the world.

The conflict between the two directed his future life and work.

It became steadily clearer to him that anyone who enjoys  
many of the good things of life

should in turn repay to others no less than he has received.

And, that we should all share some of the burdens.

His years of study were rich in work and achievement.

*Creating Balance* – based on Luke 16:19-31  
Aspen Community UMC  
September 30, 2007

Page 4 of 7

In addition to pursuing his theological and philosophical studies,  
he began his work on the life of Christ and on the gospels.  
At the same time, he was playing Bach, engrossing himself in Bach's works,  
and becoming perhaps the foremost authority of his time on the composer.

In 1913, Schweitzer finished his studies and qualified as a doctor of medicine.  
And in the spring set out on his journey to Lambarene in West Africa,  
a small village near the equator. It was here he began his new life.

Dr. Schweitzer first pursued knowledge through rational thinking.  
And then he told us that  
neither knowledge or rational thinking can explain the world and purpose of life.

There is a more elemental thought.  
that leads to an affirmation of life which is more than the will to live.  
Schweitzer put it this way:  
*"I am life that wills to live in the midst of other life that wills to live."*  
The speaker presenting the prize continues:  
There is an affirmation of life in this which leads one beyond self  
to a reverence for all who will to live,  
so that everything which maintains, nourishes, and ennobles life is good and positive.  
And, all else is evil and negative.

So, here is the parable alive and working in his life.  
And, this is how he believed that we make the divine connection.  
He put it like this: Where thought reaches its limits, there faith begins.  
And, what Christianity needs to become a living, intense, religion of love  
is to be filled with the spirit of Jesus Christ.

He said,

*Creating Balance* – based on Luke 16:19-31  
Aspen Community UMC  
September 30, 2007

Page 5 of 7

“I hope that the thought which has resulted in this simple, ethical-religious idea, *reverence for life* – may help to bring Christianity and thought closer to each other.”<sup>2</sup>

Sometimes people like Albert Schweitzer come along –  
and they set the bar higher for all of us.

But I also do not believe he is one of only a few.

There are many of his kind – they just do not always get discovered.

There are many people who in their lives are doing things  
to create balance in a world that gets terribly unbalanced in economics and justice.

We could talk about many of those.

There are many governmental and non-governmental organizations,  
some large, some small, doing this work.

There are many opportunities to learn and do, some even within our church  
like the Empowering Ministries of Health workshop in Wichita, Kansas last week  
sponsored by the Board of Global Ministries

where participants learned for example about GraceMed clinic in Kansas,  
a clinic where we open our doors and reach out to the neighbors, communities,  
and travelers with no where to go for healthcare.

Or, one of my favorite is the Seeds of Peace program for youth  
living in areas of world conflict.

These youth are brought together at a camp in Maine.

They live together, share meals, participate in athletics and art activities –  
and where in daily sessions they express thoughts and feelings  
about the conflict back home. They have chances to build relationships with persons  
they might otherwise be in armed conflict with at some later time.

More than 3,000 young people from 25 nations have graduated from Seeds of Peace with a  
deeper commitment to understanding and reconciliation – and to making connections.

These organizations are numerous, and they need our support.

*Creating Balance* – based on Luke 16:19-31  
Aspen Community UMC  
September 30, 2007

Page 6 of 7

Once again, what would Albert say to us today?

How would he invite the parable into our lives?

He would surely remind us that we are all the rich man,  
and encourage us to live our lives actively in ways that attend to and restore balance.

He would talk to us about spirit and being connected  
and demonstrating this by our actions.

Schweitzer was here at the Paepke's invitation to celebrate the  
200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of Johann Wolfgang Goethe,  
an 18<sup>th</sup> century writer, whose works include poetry, drama, literature, theology,  
humanism, science, and painting – possibly best known for writing *Faust*.

I would like to give you a few words that Schweitzer said  
that night he was here – with Thornton Wilder translating.

Listen to some things Schweitzer said about his mentor, Goethe:

Goethe's spirit places a three-fold obligation upon us:  
We must wrestle with circumstances, so that those who are imprisoned by them  
in their exhausting jobs may nevertheless be able to preserve their spiritual lives.

We must wrestle with men, so that, distracted as they constantly are  
by the external things so prominent in our time,  
they may find the road to inwardness and remain on it.

We must wrestle with ourselves and with everyone else,  
so that, in an age of confusion and inhumanity,  
we may remain loyal to the great humane ideals of the eighteenth century,  
translating them into the thought of our age and attempting to realize them."

I don't know about you, but I hear the words of our parable  
coming through in these words of Dr. Schweitzer?

Do you hear them?

This has been a powerful parable. Can it be powerful for us?

Remember the five brothers, who the rich man was unable to reach out to?

*Creating Balance* – based on Luke 16:19-31  
Aspen Community UMC  
September 30, 2007

Page 7 of 7

I would like to suggest that we may be the five brothers -  
only we get the chance to see what happens  
when we lead lives with blinders on.

We can find ourselves in our own little hells of isolation  
when we live with blinders on.

But when we see the connections and live them, we stay connected with spirit  
and with our fellow human beings.

This parable is about how ultimately we are connected.

Let's not wait until we die to learn it.

It is about what it is like to be unaware, unconscious, as we live  
and how it bankrupts us spiritually.

It is also about Lazarus, being unseen, unheard.

And sometimes we are Lazarus – and then the world misses what we have to give.

The scholars tell us, parables are often hard to sort out,  
and sometimes we really don't want to sort them out.

We really don't want to hear what they have to say.

We don't understand the kingdom, and we are just as happy  
not to have beggars as brothers.

But what we are here for, really, is to build bridges across those chasms.

We are here to discover the connections that we all share, and we are here  
to discover - with Albert – the reverence for life.

We are here - with Albert - to learn how to say,

"I am life that wills to live in the midst of other life that wills to live."

May the parable, and the life of Albert Schweitzer, his visit here  
and his legacy, enrich yours.

---

<sup>1</sup> Adapted from Madeleine I. Boucher. *The Parables*

<sup>2</sup> Schweitzer. My Life and Thought as described in Nobel speech