

“The Memo”

Sunday, September 26, 2010: Luke 16:19-31

The Rev. Peter Faass, Rector

MEMO

TO: All People Who Believe the Gospel of Jesus Christ

FROM: Dives the Rich Man

DATE: Eternity

Did you get “The Memo?” Oh, don’t tell me that you missed the memo. It was sent to all of you. Look it says so right here in the, sent “To” line of this memorandum, to All People Who Believe the Gospel of Jesus Christ. And here it says whom it’s from: Dives the Rich Man, that’s me! Yep, that’s what it says. So please tell me you got it. You need to know that I have been working long and hard trying to figure out how to contact you; how to do an end run around this great chasm that has been set between me and well, it seems all of creation. It’s been a challenge let me tell you. But then I finally figured it out. I may have been indolent and busy eating myself to death on earth, but let me tell you my mama did not raise any dumb kids.

You see, Jesus was my end run! Who would have thought? That old stickler for rules Abraham told me that there was no way I could get a message back to earth. I just wanted to warn my five brothers or anyone else for that matter, of just how bloody hot and awful it is here in Hades. Folks, the stories are true. Believe you me. Every day here it’s like being a cat on a hot tin roof, if you get the picture. And the torment, oy vey! You should not believe! It’s worse than having a pitchfork persistently goading you in the butt! And you want to know why it’s worse? It’s worse because it’s my conscience goading me each moment of every day about the abysmal way I led my earthly life. Trust me I’ll take pitchfork any day.

But then one day I spotted Jesus walking on the other side of that enormous chasm that is set between God and me. Jesus actually appeared in the very same spot where Abraham and that poor soul Lazarus had been earlier. When I saw him I yelled and I jumped up and down and waved my arms: Yo, Jesus, it’s me, Dives the rich man. I was the one who was dressed in purple and ate classical French cuisine every day of my life. It’s me Dives, over here!

“Yes, Dives, I remember you,” Jesus said looking at me. “You really led a crappy life didn’t you? It wasn’t only your conspicuous consumption of stuff, which was bad enough, but it was your complete oblivion to poor Lazarus who lay right outside the gates of your villa. The only thing that poor, sick chap ever asked for was the greasy bread trenchers left over from your elaborate meals. Yet he never received one from you. But those dogs that licked Lazarus’ festering sores did get those pitiful remnants from your table. Go figure! I just don’t get how some people can feed animals better than humans! But you, Dives, you just ignored Lazarus. How could you do that? You had all that money and time and God-given talents you never developed. What a total waste your life was.”

“I know Jesus,” I said. “I was a real callous loser. Every day in Hades I suffer the pangs of the memory of how badly I lived my life. And let me say it’s pure agony. That’s why I don’t want anyone else to suffer like I am. I want to get a message back to people on earth so they can get with the program. Straighten out their lives. But Abraham said there was no way for me to get a memo back to folks on earth, so they could clean up their acts and not suffer the same consequences.”

“Abraham is right, Dives,” Jesus replied. “The folks back on earth have received memos enough let me tell you. They got them from Moses, the prophets. Oh my gosh, even my Father made some personal appearances to get those who live their lives wastefully to stop and clean up their act. He even sent me to become human and live among people, just like one of them. And God knows I tried to teach and preach and heal and role model what a well-lived life is supposed to look like. But look what happened to me.” At that he held out his arms and showed me some hideous wounds on his wrists. “There is not much more that can be done,” Jesus said.

“But what about you, Jesus?” Dives replied. Can’t you warn the people so that they do not come into this place of torment?”

“Ah Dives, like I said, there is not much more to be . . . wait a minute there may be one way left! Yes, yes! That’s it! I’ve got these four guys – Matthew, Mark, Luke and John - writing the definitive story of my life and ministry. You know; four biographical pieces that will fit together like a television mini-series. That Luke especially likes a good parable. Those doctors just love to speak obliquely. Let me see if he can weave your story in with the rest of the text he’s writing. I’ll have him write it so that I tell your story to the Pharisees, who were a lot like you Dives, mean-spirited to those in need; guys who could easily do nothing for someone in need and justify their bad behavior.”

“Jesus, that sounds like a great idea,” Dives said excitedly! “Do you think it stands a chance? Will people listen to the story in Luke? Will they get the memo? Will they learn to look on the suffering of the world, both great and small and feel moved to do something? Will they see not just the overwhelming problems that face humanity but the small ones, those individual situations of human need that occur right before their own eyes every day. Will they be able to see even the smallest human need, those sorrows that need to be comforted, fears that can be allayed and respond with compassion? Will they become sacrificial enough to put aside their own needs and place others before themselves? Will they be foolish enough to think they can make a difference when others say it can’t be done?”

“Because Jesus, let me tell you the worst sin of all is to not notice or care.”

A tired and sad look came over Jesus’ face. “I know, Dives, I know,” he said. “I experienced that myself. But we will make this one last attempt. We’ll try to get this message across to people just one more time and see if they finally do notice. And change.”

End of memo.