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St. Stephen's in-the-Field, San Jose

Jeremiah 32:1-3a, 6-15     Jeremiah has faith in God's ultimate protection.

Psalm 91:1-6, 14-16

1 Tim 6:6-19

Be generous, ready to share, storing up a good foundation for the future

Luke 16:19-31

Do belongings demonstrate God's blessing? It's a test...

“The dangers of spiritual complacency.”

Jessica Hullinger wrote earlier this year in the magazine *The Week* (4/28/16) about the “transcendental revelations of astronauts.” She says that astronauts claimed to experience something in space in 1987 that was later termed “The Overview Effect”—“a sense recently begun studying the effects of awe, but they believe we experience awe when we are confronted with something vast, either physically big (the Grand Canyon, for example) or conceptually huge (like meeting your favorite celebrity). For a moment, this vastness confuses the mind, and forces the brain to accommodate by making room for what it's seeing.”

The Overview Effect was experienced when astronauts were able to view earth from a distance—as something “apart” from their own location in space. Here's how it is defined by the Overview Institute: “[The Overview Effect] refers to the experience of seeing firsthand the reality of the Earth in space, which is immediately understood to be a tiny, fragile ball of life, hanging in the void, shielded and nourished by a paper-thin atmosphere. From space, the astronauts tell us, national boundaries vanish, the conflicts that divide us become less important and the need to create a planetary society with the united will to protect this ‘pale blue dot’ becomes both obvious and imperative.” It seems that an Overview Effect would bring about a change in consciousness that is badly needed in our world, to bring souls together; to affirm our shared life under God; to bridge all the seemingly impossible gaps in quality of life that exist on this planet.

Does it take a trip to the ISS to experience this Overview Effect? Or does a commitment to our faith life under God offer us that perspective?

In Luke's Gospel, the rich man is not being condemned for being rich, but for his indifference and uncaring attitude towards poor Lazarus right outside the gate to his home.

The rich man was not named in the story, but he is commonly named Dives (Dye-veez), derived from the Latin word meaning ‘rich man’. It was commonly believed that the rich were rich because God has blessed them for their faithfulness; and the poor were being punished for their sins. In this

Gospel story, Jesus seems to suggest that God did not bless Dives to reward great things he had done, but to see what he would do with the blessing. He failed the test. Dives only cared about making his own life better. A core issue behind the use of his blessing was placing trust in himself and in the world; rather than in God. It is HOW we use God's gifts that is important. Those of us who are comfortable have an obligation to find ways to help those in need.

We do not know from this story of Dives if good deeds came first or the blessing came first; but the result was that Dives became someone giving no thought to the way he should use his resources – his blessings - to please God. There is a message for all of us here, to be careful about squandering any blessing we have been given.

Paul said to Timothy, “As for those who in the present age are rich, they are to be rich in good words, generous, and ready to share, thus storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future.”

What richness of blessings do you have?

Riches: money (this is the easy one to list)

Hospitality

Compassion; being a good listener

A love for working with children

Art -> in making cards; icons; religious artwork

Knitting-> warm clothing items for homeless, prayer shawls

Baking-> foods at Thanksgiving and Christmas and other times

Academics-> lead a Bible study

Finances; Organizing; Languages; being ‘handy’ at fixing things; computer skills

Example of a Dives moment: Jane's phone call on Thursday. Her daughter lives a few hours away; had just called mother to share that three months ago she was sexually assaulted, by a well known man in that city. She was threatened to say nothing; need to tell mother what had happened, and two days ago attempted suicide. Police are involved, mom knows she needs to get her daughter safely here with her. Mother is homeless, no money; wanted money to help with room rent for her daughter. She got what I had, and left to pay the deposit, and to go that day to get her daughter. Your discretionary donation provided that payment. Discretionary donations bring these situations to us. How do we avoid Dives' response? Listening for God.

What blessing of gifts do you have that are not being used? In what ways have you allowed your busy life to prevent your blessing to flow to other people? In what ways are we each guilty of spiritual complacency?

Each of us is to use our blessings in such a way that our life demonstrates the difference between Christian values and secular values.

Manage your blessings so that others share in the blessing.

Manage your blessings so that God can see the difference it is making in you... and in others.

Celebrate the “Overview Effect” that YOU make happen by carrying God’s blessings into the world. Amen.