

Message Delivery Systems

Jeremiah 32:1-3, 6-15, Luke 16:19-31

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"I didn't get the memo."

"I didn't see your text."

"I missed your email."

"I haven't checked FB, Insta, Snapchat, Whatsapp or whatever lately."

"My phone was on silent and I missed your call."

We live in a time where there are more ways for people to "not get the message" than there have ever been. So many message delivery systems that I think sometimes we are overwhelmed and ignore them all. Or at least I do. If you have a smart phone, take it out right now and look at it. How many apps do you have on there that supply information of some kind to you? If you don't have a smart phone, move over to someone who does. I counted 18 apps on my phone that give me some kind of information, from the weather to the news to how many steps I have walked to messages from my kids and more. I have a feeling that my count is far below most anyone who is under 40! Is it any wonder that we constantly see people walking around looking down at their phones? How do we have time to consume so much information in any given day? So many messages. Which of them are truly worth hearing?

I have always been fascinated by the end of this little parable we read in Luke. Remember that parables are stories Jesus made up to convey a point. Often, we concentrate on the fact that the rich man was so mean to poor Lazarus and never even realized what he had not done. Like the old prayer of confession with the line: "Forgive me for what I have done, and **what I have left undone.**" The rich man didn't have a smart phone to distract him. He had lots of stuff, though, and it sounds like a never-ending banquet table, his version of constantly consuming! He was, we are led to believe, a person who knew the Bible and so was part of the faith community, along with his family. But he had not taken time to receive the message from the delivery system of the scriptures, so, he claimed, he had no idea he had done wrong.

He begged for Abraham to get the message out to his brothers so they wouldn't make the same mistake. He felt that the message delivery system of the scriptures

was simply ineffective, but if his brothers had a visit from the dead, kind of like Ebenezer Scrooge in the Christmas Carol, then they would change their behavior. Abraham said no, they already knew how to act and were willfully ignoring the message they already knew.

There's the challenge Jesus presents. How do we make decisions about how we choose to interact with other people based on what messages we receive? **What delivery systems we prioritize in our lives?** For the church and people like me whose jobs are to be message delivery systems, this is a critical question! How do we get our message in sideways in a world full of other message delivery systems that don't always present us with loving choices in teaching us how to live? How do we confront messages given in social media which say that your value is based on how many "likes" you have, or how beautiful you look in pictures? How do we call out cyberbullies? How do we expose lies in messaging systems?

How utterly easy it seems for Jesus to have Father Abraham say that if you have the Bible, you have enough and don't need any other messages to guide you in how to live in love with other people! Jesus never read a Facebook feed!

Think for a moment about how you evaluate the world and the people in it. What guides you in your daily interactions with people? What value system determines how you act with people who are different from you in some way? How do you decide what is good and loving in relationships, and what is not? Write it down, make notes on your phone, or a mental list of what message delivery systems help mold your moral core, how you make decisions? Based on what messages?

How do you feel about that list? Where, if at all, is your faith represented there? It may very well be that this particular delivery system, a fairly traditional worship service using a book that is very, very old, is not working to share the gospel that Jesus shared in story and teaching and action. We need to work on that. We need to make sure we communicate clearly, robustly and joyfully the utter simplicity of Jesus' base message that the rich man certainly did not get in relation to a man he still tried to treat as a slave after death ("Father Abraham, send Lazarus down to give me some water!!"). The prophets to whom Father Abraham referred said that what was required of us is to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God. Jesus repeated other words from the ancient writings: Love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, and love your neighbor as you love yourself. In the midst of all the messages coming at us from whatever source we use, paper or screen of any kind, may those words ground us, guide us, and give us courage and joy. Amen.