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*He was almost invisible...*

The rich man, snug inside his home, simply couldn't be bothered with every bum or beggar who lounged beside his gate.

The servants, busy with many things, no longer noticed the cripples who crowded around the door, or the children holding empty bowls.

In fact, no one, not even the guests arriving for the feast, ever really "saw" him. But as they passed by, they turned their heads and clutched their robes a little tighter determined to stay clean and undefiled. After all, a man like that must have done *something* wrong to lose God's favor.

And so, he was almost invisible – except to the dogs who licked his sores and snarled at him over the scraps of meat and crumbs of stale bread.

We don't really know what brought him to the rich man's gate alone and in need. Maybe he lost his job or was ruined by an ugly scandal. Maybe he was injured or became sick.

Or maybe he had *always* been lost. Maybe he lived his entire life among the stray animals, crying out for relief.

No one knows how he ended up at the gate, and no one really cares either, because you see, he is almost invisible.

And yet of all the people in all the parables he alone is given a name... *Lazarus*. Lazarus, which means *God has helped*.

Almost every day, she sits in the empty doorway next to St. Joseph Church in Salem. If you stop to look, you will see that both she, and the church have seen better days.

Those who work at the capital pass on their way to work or back home and they can hear her sing a tuneless song in a trembling old voice.

Sometimes, it seems the fog lifts a bit, and she wonders how she got there and why she doesn't just go home.

But most of the time, her days pass in a haze of booze and dementia and forgotten dreams. And most of the time, she is almost invisible.

He is the kind of kid who never quite fits in. In the eyes of his classmates at Le Creole Junior High he always looks a little different – a little awkward, a little strange. He seems to be all elbows and feet and sticking out hair. The boy isn't mean, or silly or emotionally disturbed, He is just different.

His laughter is a little too desperate, and his voice a little too shrill. His answers are often wrong, or even worse – unusual. He is the kind of boy who dies a little bit at recess each and every day.

While the others swarm over the field and argue over choosing up sides, and bragging about who is the fastest and the best, and who will win and which captain will get the first choice, he stands alone just beyond the field, knowing that no captain will choose him.

The other kids are never openly cruel, they don't really care enough to be mean and besides, the playground moms who gossip and patrol the blacktop with band-aids are too busy to notice - he is just ignored. And in the narrow and complicated world of recess, that can be the deepest cut of all – far too deep to be helped by a simple band-aid.

And so on a bright Autumn day, on a Dallas playground, Lazarus stands waiting at the gate.

Some of Jesus' parables are comforting. The lost sheep. The lost coin. The lost son like we heard a couple of weeks ago. These are stories that invite us to cozy up and snuggle deep into the Gospel like Grandma's old quilt.

These parables remind us that we are loved by God – no matter how lost we are; no matter how far we stray.

Other parables are not quite so soothing. And some of them are downright disturbing. These parables like the one we read today, remind us that God loves the unusual. They remind us that what we see is not always what God sees.

They paint a picture of discipleship that's not exactly painless, or simple or even very safe. They teach us that some of the most serious offenses against God are not the sins that we commit, but the acts that we omit – the most serious offenses against God are apathy, absence, neglect.

The rich man never really hurt Lazarus. He didn't hate him, or abuse him. He didn't cause Lazarus' problems – he didn't put him there. He simply ignored him.

We desperately want this parable to be about “them” The spoiled rich athlete, the big time oil executive, the wealthy rock star, the prickly politician with political power - them. The ones who should really DO something about the beggar at the gate.

After all, very few, if any of us, have the where with all to feast in luxury every night. Most of us can barely cover our mortgage payments, food, tuition, gas, health care, braces, weekly offering. And some of us struggle just to make one day meet the next.

But maybe God is trying to remind us that the world of rich and poor; the world of have and have not; the world of visible and invisible; is not God’s creation, but our own.

Maybe God is trying to remind us that *everything* – our lives, our talents, our food, our ability to earn money, our desire to support our families, our shelter, even our faith is pure gift.

And because of those gifts, the way we deal with Lazarus matters to God. The way we view poverty and wealth, matters to God. The way we handle material goods matters to God.

The beggar outside the gate, the old woman lost in disease and despair, the child standing alone on the playground, the man or woman struggling with painful addiction, the prisoner learning about forgiveness; these are people loved by God.

God knows each and every one of them. God knows each and every name, each and every need, even when the world appears to be blind to them.

Maybe through this parable, God is trying to remind us that no matter where we live, no matter who we are, no matter how much money we have or will make, Lazarus is waiting for us at the gate.

And somehow, through him Christ is there waiting for us, too.