

Another kind of gate (Luke 16:19-31)

The rich man's approach to Lazarus could have been different.

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We are in the midst of replacing fences around our small urban yard, closing off the gaps that opened up after too many years of inattention to water, weather, and wear.

The motivation for this construction project is our escape-artist dog, Halo, who risks joining the angels if she gets too near the wheels of a passing car. We hope the fences will keep her inside and protect her from harm.

Along with fences come gates. Three of them, to be precise, a nice trinity of options. One gate separates our yard from the back alley, while another serves a similar function at the front of the house, blocking direct access from the sidewalk just a few feet away.

These two gates make it possible for us to come and go from our little oasis, but the fences alongside them signal that we really do not want the neighborhood joggers to take a shortcut through our yard or the local dog-walkers to use our tiny tomato patch as a puppy pit stop.

Although gates give the appearance of welcome, they might as well serve as stop signs to anybody approaching our house from the front or rear. "Don't come in," they say, "unless we invite you." Those two gates are not very hospitable. They cut us off from our neighbors and require a greater effort from us to overcome the

barriers they create.

In Jesus' parable, the gate alongside which Lazarus lies is also a stop-sign gate. It signals to Lazarus and everyone else that they really are not welcome. *Keep out*, the gate says. *Don't bother the rich man or his way of life. He'd rather remain separated from you.* The gate seems to serve only that purpose, and eventually it turns into an impassable chasm—to the detriment of both Lazarus and the rich man.

Gates do not have to function this way.

The third gate at our house was in place when we moved in, thanks to the next-door neighbors. To be honest, if it had been up to us, we probably would have installed a stop-sign gate, one whose access we could control. Thankfully, our neighbors did something different.

Midway along the low fence that separates our yard from theirs, they installed a gate that swings open from either side. Despite our initial skepticism, that gate has been an enormous gift to us and, we hope, to them.

Through that gate we have received help with a major repair project and gifts of homemade cake and grilled shrimp. Children have come through that gate to play with our dog. Our return offerings have been received with graciousness, and our lives have been enhanced by the several families who have lived in that house over the years. Gate number three has called forth a spirit of welcome from both sides of the fence.

The rich man could have a similar kind of gate, if only he would trust that a stop-sign gate is not his best choice. He has the knowledge, resources, and ability to make a difference to Lazarus. Instead, he prefers an earthly life of excess and indifference, cut off from others, rather than the abundant life offered by God.

It need not be that way.