

Flynn Walker has a big brother named Easton, but he's about to get a whole lot more of them.

Flynn will be baptized, naming him *child of God*, and God has a lot of other children.

When we joyfully parade him around the sanctuary, is it so that he can meet the family...so that he can meet his sisters and brothers, not all of whom look like him.

We have to introduce you to him, because otherwise it may not be obvious in years to come that the faces around him, including those he has locked out of his home and his tightly gated attention, are actually his sisters and brothers.

It is a lesson that the tragic figure in Jesus' parable, the man cursed with wealth, never learned.

He clearly recognized Abraham as his father, but he never realized that Abraham's child Lazarus was therefore his brother.

By the time he was in hell, he saw Lazarus, knew his name, was even willing to let his dirty, dog-infested, finger touch him, but he still viewed Lazarus as a lackey, raised by the angels, but only from waif to waterboy.

The rich man tells father Abraham that he has a father and five brothers; yet still says nothing to his brother sitting there at father Abraham's side.

He pleads for Lazarus to be relocated by the authorities--this is probably not the first time--this time to leave paradise to serve as his personal errand boy to those he recognizes as his brothers.

John Shea astutely paraphrases Abraham's response:

*You lived a life of luxury, deafened yourself to Moses and the prophets, and numbed yourself to the needs of the poor.*

*So now you are on the other side where the consequences of actions reach fulfillment.*

*You find yourself isolated and tormented.*

*Is this a surprise?*

*Our entire people began as poor and exploited.*

*Everything in our history has urged us to welcome the poor and exploited.*

*You have not done this.*

*Do you really think you can ignore and resist God's purposes and succeed?*

*Did you miss that teaching at synagogue?*

*Now you want a spectacular sign for your brothers.*

*Is this an excuse?*

*Are you saying there wasn't enough evidence for you?*

*If you just had a little more certainty, your self-interest would have kicked in and you would have "anted up."*

*I don't think so.*

*That's not the problem.*

*If your brothers, like yourself, do not heed the whole history of their people, they will not listen to a man come back from the dead.* (John Shea, *The Relentless Widow*, p. 277)

There are family expectations for Abraham's children, outlined clearly and repeatedly in Moses and the prophets, chief among them to care for the poor and the vulnerable like family... because they are.

It is an expectation shared by children of God in Christ, who says that whatever we do or fail to do to the hungry and thirsty and sick and imprisoned we do or fail to do to him.

Flynn, child of God, you are being introduced to a broad swath of humanity sharing the same Father in heaven.

You are being welcomed into a family much wider than you see even in this room, blessed as it is with variety in age and income and circumstance.

Because you are baptized, you can no longer risk passing someone on the street or ignoring someone on your fancy, factory direct doorstep because chances are they are your brother, your sister, your Savior.

God overruled skeptical Abraham, said maybe the tormented rich man's idea is worth a try. Lazarus was sent back from the dead, under the assumed name "Jesus."

Revelation says he stands at the door and knocks, but really he sits at the gate and waits. His poverty is not so much a shame to him as it is to us.

Now we live in a country that has more than enough to feed the world, I suspect even enough to satisfy all who hunger with the waste that falls from our tables and fills our garbage trucks.

The people who ache with need may or may not be homeless, or mentally ill, or drug addicts, or welfare cases, or drains on the system, or capable of finding a job, or lazy, or shiftless, or irresponsible...they may or may not be judged to deserve their fate in the courtroom of our opinionated political hearts...but no matter what we think of them or decide how to respond to their situation, they are family.

They are children of God.

They are our brothers and sisters.

They are Christ in our midst, come back from the dead for us, open sores and all.

And on this side of our own death, there is still a chance to be called, in the prophet's words, *the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to live in.* (Isaiah 58:12)

The chasm here between rich and poor has not been eternally fixed; we can still cross over, we can still close the gap, we can still open the gate.

And when we do, and we encounter our suffering siblings who are poor and miserable or rich and miserable, we encounter the one who crossed the fixed chasm between death and life to reach us, whose suffering and shame we now trace in oil on Flynn's forehead.

Brother Flynn, child of God, welcome to the family.

Look around you, not only today, but for the rest of your life, and see the faces.

Pay attention to the stories.

Open your eyes and your heart and your hand and your gate.

*Care for others and the world God made, and work for justice and peace.*

Be kind and generous and attentive, even when it feels more comfortable not to be.

The face you'd rather avoid is family.

The neighbor who threatens your property value is your brother.

And the beggar with the hollow, desperate eyes is a face you will see again when the angels carry you away to his throne.