

A son told this story of his experience just before his father died. The man and his sister were taking care of their father who was in the last stages of cancer. The son stayed with the bed-ridden father during the day and his sister stayed with their father through the night.

It had been a hard day. The man and his father had not always gotten along well, and on this particular day his father was especially irritable and giving him a hard time. The son was impatient, waiting for his sister to come for the night shift. He had his coat and shoes on so he could leave as quickly as possible when she arrived.

He heard his father call to him from the other room. He went in, and his father asked, “What do you think happens to us after this life?”

The man didn’t have many words, but he thought he would show his father his answer. He got into bed and lay down beside his father. He asked, “Dad, do you love me?” “You know I love you,” his father said.

The man touched his own chest and then touched his father’s chest, right above his heart. The man asked, “How much of our ability to love do you think we use during our lives? Ten percent?”

“Fifteen,” said his father. “Okay,” said the man. “In heaven,” he said, touching his own chest and then his father’s, “one hundred percent.”

The next morning the man received a call from his sister, telling him his father had died, quite peacefully. But moments before he died, he made a gesture she didn’t understand. He looked at her, touched his chest—his heart—and then reached up and touched hers.

*The life that really is life* is true connection, true love, right relationship, no chasms between us. We were made for relationship. We were made to be in right relationship with God and with one another, including the neighbors we prefer to ignore.

But we don’t live that way. We always have a relationship with something else, something that takes up part of that heart space so we don’t use all one hundred percent for loving God and loving our neighbor. Sometimes that something is money or seeking our own comfort over the needs of others.

In the parable of Lazarus, Jesus is retelling a classic folktale of his era. We think it originated in Egypt and was told among Gentiles of Luke’s audience. Jesus uses a classic story telling technique about an imaginary future to provoke change in his listeners.

Think of Charles Dickens’ story *A Christmas Carol*. Dickens used the same technique. *A Christmas Carol* isn’t about the reality of ghosts, it is about the possibility of a stubborn, closed-in, old man’s conversion to generosity and joy.

After his conversion, Scrooge says, *Men’s courses will foreshadow certain ends, to which, if persevered in, they must lead. But if the courses be departed from, the ends will change.*

Our courses foreshadow certain ends, to which, if persevered in, they must lead. But if the courses be departed from, the ends will change.