

I.N.I.

Second Sunday in Lent
March 17, 2019
Luke 22:21-30

In Christ Jesus, the Suffering Servant who reveals God's glory in His suffering service for us,
Dear Fellow Redeemed,

We mentioned last Sunday that in these Sunday mornings during Lent, we will be looking at the places of the Passion. Last week we were in the Upper Room and learned that Jesus has indeed prepared a table for us, a place for us, not only at His Supper, but in His heavenly home. Tonight we again go back to that Upper Room. As we heard last week, Jesus celebrated the Passover with His disciples and then instituted His new meal, His Supper. That was His Last Will and Testament. He is bidding His disciples farewell. Soon He will suffer and die for them and all the world.

Jesus knows that His people often get things wrong. From the Israelites who elevated their worship of God over the God they worshiped, to the disciples who placed their following of the Lord over the Lord they followed, God's people frequently struggle with glory and service.

So we listen to Jesus as He takes an argument about glory and turns it into an invitation for service. After Jesus has served His disciples, He looks out over the room and He sees division and strife. The disciples are divided by arguments over greatness and glory.

He has spoken about being betrayed and His body being broken and given into death, and now through His words He transforms the Upper Room from a place of strife over glory to a place of glorious service.

In this one small moment between Jesus and His disciples, we see two visions of faith:

- (1) faith mixed with glory, bold and larger than life, and
- (2) faith, small and humble, hidden in love for the least.

The disciples reveal faith mixed with glory, bold and larger than life. Their argument occurs right after our Lord served them by washing their feet giving them an example to follow. He served them the Passover meal and also His Supper, offering to them His forgiving love, and yet His disciples refuse to become servants, humble and contrite in spirit, crying out for God's mercy. Instead, they argue with one another over greatness. Luke tells us that **NOW THERE WAS ALSO A DISPUTE AMONG THEM, AS TO WHICH OF THEM SHOULD BE CONSIDERED THE GREATEST.**

While Jesus is predicting His suffering and death, they are arguing about greatness. Having spent three years with Jesus, listening to His teachings, seeing Him cast out demons and rule over creation, the disciples now turn their eyes toward one another to see whose life is filled with glory. **"WHO IS THE GREATEST AMONG US?"** they ask. As Jesus welcomes dishonor, His disciples fight over honor. As Jesus speaks about suffering, His disciples argue about glory.

How very sad! But before we tsk! too much and shake our heads too hard, we need to look no further than ourselves to see that such arguments tend to be common among God's people, then and now.

Whether you look at the Church at large or at an individual congregation like ours, it is not hard to come across division and strife, striving for glory and honor. God's people are frequently divided in arguments about gifts and greatness. As we heard in our Scripture reading, it happened in Corinth. Here you had a church blessed with a multitude of gifts: faith and healing and miraculous powers. And in such a place, was there peace? No. God's people were too busy

arguing about all of their gifts, trying to see which was the greatest. God's church became divided, as people fought over God's blessings. Some followed Paul, others Apollos, others Peter. The very pastors that God had given them became tools that Satan used to divide them. Satan wants to turn us against one another, and he uses God's gifts to do it. He tries to turn our gifts into things that cause us to fight. Our confessions of faith, our offerings to God, our service in the Church, our witness to the world become ways in which we divide ourselves into groups. Into those who are really committed and those who are not. He gives us visions of faith, but we mix them with glory, bold and larger than life. Slowly, our gifts begin to separate us as Satan uses the good things of God to divide.

And the tragedy of all this is not the wasted time, not the wasted gifts, not the hurt feelings, and not the words said in anger. The real tragedy of all of this is that we end up missing the very thing that God wants us to see: His work of loving service. We find ourselves busy with all the disagreement and dissension, when right in our midst God is doing the one thing that brings about agreement, the one work that is greater than anyone here has ever done or known: the humble work of His saving service, giving His life for us!

In Jesus, we have the true picture of greatness and glory. When at a dinner at a Pharisee's house, Jesus noted how people were seeking places of honor. He spoke in parables to destroy their rituals of honor, which were built upon systems of riches and works, and invited them to a life of service, where one gives all to those who have nothing and can give nothing in return. When seeing individuals approaching God with pride in their own accomplishments, Jesus again used a parable to reveal God's delight in the one who is humble and contrite in spirit in the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican. Throughout His ministry, Jesus has sought to show and teach a different way of approaching the world, seeking to serve rather than be served, to humble oneself rather than to receive praise.

As we said, earlier in the upper room Jesus washed the disciples' feet. After He did that He said, **DO YOU KNOW WHAT I HAVE DONE TO YOU? YOU CALL ME TEACHER AND LORD, AND YOU SAY WELL, FOR SO I AM. IF I THEN, YOUR LORD AND TEACHER, HAVE WASHED YOUR FEET, YOU ALSO OUGHT TO WASH ONE ANOTHER'S FEET. FOR I HAVE GIVEN YOU AN EXAMPLE, THAT YOU SHOULD DO AS I HAVE DONE TO YOU. MOST ASSUREDLY, I SAY TO YOU, A SERVANT IS NOT GREATER THAN HIS MASTER; NOR IS HE WHO IS SENT GREATER THAN HE WHO SENT HIM. IF YOU KNOW THESE THINGS, BLESSED ARE YOU IF YOU DO THEM.**

They hadn't listened very well. Notice how Jesus now responds to His disciples' argument. Once before, His disciples had argued about greatness. When that happened, Jesus took a child and placed that child in their midst (Luke 9:46–48). Children had little to no social status at that time. Yet Jesus interrupted His disciples' grand and glorious visions by asking them to look at a child. That child, easily overlooked and easily ignored, was, to Jesus, a little picture of faith. Jesus held a child and revealed the hidden nature of God's glory. God's glory is a life of humbly serving the one who is least in the Kingdom.

This time Jesus does more. Rather than place a child in their midst, Jesus calls His disciples to be like children. When His disciples argue over greatness, Jesus reveals faith in humble service. He asks His disciples a question: **FOR WHO IS GREATER, HE WHO SITS AT THE TABLE, OR HE WHO SERVES? IS IT NOT HE WHO SITS AT THE TABLE? YET I AM AMONG YOU AS THE ONE WHO SERVES.** The disciples would have agreed that Jesus was greatest among them, that He was the one who should recline at the table, but Jesus calls their attention to His action. He was the one who was serving. Not only has He served them at the table, but He is going to serve them as He suffers betrayal, denial, torture and death on the

cross. The Creator comes to die for His creatures. Here, hidden in this service, is the greatness and glory of God.

Jesus identifies with that which is least in this world, becoming the Crucified One, rejected by the world, by religious leaders, by His disciples, even by His heavenly Father, and yet in that rejection, He fiercely and faithfully saves every last sinner, and holds on to every last fallen child of God. In His dying, Jesus silences all arguments of greatness and glory by revealing the amazing mercy of God. Through His death, the least are brought into the kingdom of God.

As we struggle with our old Adam who seeks glory and to make a name for ourselves, Jesus freely gives us the only name that truly matters. You are a child of God, forgiven of your sins, and greatly loved by your Heavenly Father. The Father places His hand over you and gives you His greatest blessing. He saves you from eternal death by the death of His Son, Jesus. God now calls you His son, His daughter.

As children of God, we don't know the future. We don't know the struggles that the future may bring. But Jesus wants us to know the comfort of His service for us for all time. Although one will betray Him, another deny Him, Satan divide them, and the world fight against them; although we, too, have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God; have our sinful, selfish flesh to contend with; although all of this is true, there is one who comes among us and brings us the true glory of God. Jesus reveals God's glory in suffering service. He comes to fulfill all that God has planned. He goes to the cross and offers His life that He might come today and offer forgiveness to us.

We are children of God. In Jesus, God has brought us into a Kingdom that death, the devil, and all of our petty arguments can never destroy. This world of arguments about greatness and glory has become a place of great service in Him.

Amen.

THE UPPER ROOM: A PLACE OF SERVICE

The First Reading from Isaiah 66:1–2 offers a fundamental contrast that shapes our meditation on this portion of Luke's Passion Narrative. Isaiah contrasts the rule of God (v. 1a) with the rites of temple worship (vv. 1b and 3). God has made all and rules over all and does not delight in the mere performance of ritualistic sacrifice. Rather, what God delights in is the one who is "humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at My word" (v. 2). Here, Isaiah calls God's people who come before Him in worship to have a servant's heart.

Psalms 123 echoes that sentiment as God's people humbly assume the stance of servants (v. 2), cry out to God for mercy (v. 3), and confess their dissatisfaction with a world that operates on the basis of wealth and ease and trades in the commodities of honor and pride (v. 4).

Understanding the importance of honor in the world of the disciples and the early Christians. For our culture, honor has been replaced by tolerance. Rather than honor particular individuals (which might suggest a moral order to which everyone should abide), our culture pleads for

diversity and tolerance of all sorts and manners of life. Publicists tell us that “all publicity is good publicity,” so even situations that might bring dishonor in some cultural settings are not seen as particularly problematic. Celebrities such as Kim Kardashian and Paris Hilton are created out of sex tapes that have been leaked to the public.

In addition to no longer understanding matters of honor, our culture has lost a sense of community. Individualism is rampant in our cultural setting, and therefore we have a hard time understanding how the honor or dishonor accorded a particular person has a way of affecting those who follow that person. Our cultural setting makes it easy for us not to hear the deep destabilizing words of Jesus as He speaks to His disciples. And yet, these words are so important for Christians today. As our culture moves further and further away from Christendom and as Christians are singled out for ridicule and abuse, the words of Jesus guide us to walk in the way of the cross and keep our hearts and minds focused on Him and His work of salvation.

The teaching of Jesus about humiliation and exaltation, about human glory and divine service is not new to this section of Luke. Throughout His ministry, Jesus has been teaching His disciples the strange ways of God’s kingdom.

Now, on the night when Jesus Himself will be dishonored as He humbly pursues His Father’s mission of saving service, Jesus stops to remind His disciples of the ways of God. The disciples are arguing over which of them is the greatest (22:24). Interestingly, this argument seems to arise out of their questioning which of them would betray Him (v. 23). How easily the failure of others leads us not into confession of our own failings but into protestations of our worth.

Jesus opens their eyes to how they are behaving like the world around them, where individuals gained a title of “benefactor” by using their wealth and power to do good for the community, which responded in praise. Such a system of honor fostered acts of community service for the sake of gaining praise. God’s work will be radically different from that.

Jesus is going to do an act of service not for Himself but for others, not for the sake of gaining honor but for the sake of bringing the salvation of God to a world that does not deserve it. His work will not be like that of one who reclines at table but like that of one who serves (vv. 26–27). The service He will provide, salvation from sin, will be as easily disregarded as a slave washing your feet. Jesus Himself will be dishonored as He brings salvation to a fallen world, and His disciples who follow Him will share in that dishonor. Crucifixion is degrading, dehumanizing Jesus in the eyes of others, numbering Him among trespassers, and making it impossible for Him to be considered a leader in any of the social systems of that day. Whereas before, when the disciples went out in mission in His name, they were received with hospitality (v. 35 and Luke 9:1–6; 10:1–12), now they will be rejected and in need of even the basic necessities of life (v. 36). Yet they will be participating in God’s gracious work, the unfolding of His kingdom, in suffering service to the One who saves all people from their sins.

At least for the past generation, such ridicule has not been the daily experience of Christians in America. Yet, that is where our culture is headed. So, this sermon prepares God’s people to turn from seeking greatness among themselves or in the eyes of the world and instead to turn their eyes to Jesus and live in His self-sacrificial service, which brings salvation and the forgiveness of sins.

The sermon opens by considering two ways of envisioning faith: as a glorious action, revealed in one’s greatness, or as a humble action, hidden in love for the least. The contrast between the two ways of glory and suffering service governs the flow of the sermon and seeks to follow the flow of the text from the argument among the disciples about greatness to the words of instruction by Jesus about humility.

The first part of the sermon examines the way of glory. It attends to the argument of the disciples (v. 24) and then invites God's people to consider arguments that they have among themselves, seeking glory in the midst of a world that no longer praises Christians.

The second part of the sermon turns our eyes to Jesus and listens to His instruction (vv. 25–27). Here, the sermon references Luke 14:7–14 to help God's people overhear how Jesus has offered this instruction to His disciples before. There, He placed a child in their midst. This time, He enters into their midst and does the work of the divine servant that will make them children of God. Such service is our certain hope in the midst of an uncertain future: it answers our failures in following with forgiveness and counters the forces of our culture that dishonor us with trust in the humble saving service of our Lord.

THEME

Jesus enters into places where His people strive for glory, and He reveals the humble service of God that makes us His children.

SERMON STRUCTURE

Contrast

OUTLINE

- I. **Contrasting Images of Heroic Faith and Humble Service:** The sermon will open with the contrast between two pictures by Rembrandt of the sacrifice of Isaac. One is bold and filled with heroic faith, and the other is small and filled with humble service.
- II. **Text: A Vision of Glory:** In the Upper Room, as Jesus bids His disciples farewell, He is confronted with their desires for glory as they argue among themselves as to which of them is the greatest.
- III. **Application:** This kind of fighting continues to happen in the Church today. We can see people striving for recognition and glory in our midst.
- IV. **Text: A Vision of Humble Service:** Jesus enters into this argument about greatness and reveals the humble nature of His ways. He will suffer to bring about the forgiveness of our sins of pride that He might claim us as His children.
- V. **Application:** As we struggle to make a name for ourselves, Jesus gives us the only name that really matters: child of God, forgiven of sin and hidden in the embrace of God.

SERMON