

MAUNDY THURSDAY SERVICE: 4-9-09

Scripture Lesson: Luke 22:14-30

Sermon: A Kingdom of Servants

It almost seems like a contradiction in terms, does it not? A Kingdom of Servants! How in the world could that be? A Kingdom is a geographical territory where there are a multitude of social levels. The first, of course, is that a Kingdom needs to have a King... or a Queen, perhaps both a King and Queen. It is interesting that even when a Queen is ruling all by herself, they still call it a Kingdom. Jesus even used this age old word when he says: "My Kingdom is not of this world.."(John 18:36)

Which points up the dimension of Kingdom that is of utmost importance. A Kingdom has geographically defined boundaries. Wars are fought over the extent of those boundaries. France and Germany both claimed Alsas-Lorraine. And so, World War I was fought. Hitler wanted to extend the boundaries of Germany across the face of the globe and so we fought WW II. But Jesus said, "My Kingdom is not of this world." Forget about your geographical boundaries when you think about the Kingdom of God. We cannot equate God's Kingdom with any human, earthly kingdom that has ever existed, or will ever exist. There is an innate danger in calling our Nation a Christian Nation. We need to be very careful about this

claim because Jesus said: “My Kingdom is not of this world.”

Almost every time Jesus opens his mouth to speak, he challenges preconceived notions that have shaped our understanding of life. We know that we are a democracy, not a Kingdom, but that does not deter us from understanding that within our society there is a rather stratified social level. Hollingsworth, one of the most noted Sociologists of the 20th Century classified American Society into nine levels of social strata. There was the Upper Class, the Middle Class and the Lower Class. But even then he was able to delineate within each class three sub-classes.. there is the Upper Upper, the middle Upper and the lower upper. There is the Upper Middle Class, the Middle Class and the Lower Middle Class. And finally there is the upper lower, the middle lower and the lower lower class. But Jesus tells his disciples and us “My Kingdom is not of this world.” It has nothing to do with who is The President or who is the plumber.

Jesus constantly turned the world of his day on its head. You may live in this world as a member of a stratified social class. You may understand life in ways that divide people into groups that lord it over other groups. You may function in the work a day world within a very rigid pecking order. We know who the bank president is. We know who the plant manager is. We know who the town council member is. And we also know who picks up the garbage behind the fellowship hall every week, and who keeps the water system working and who fixes our flat tire

and who waits on our table when we go to Appleby's. This is how the world works. But Jesus says: "My Kingdom is not of this world."

Can you remember to whom he said this? He spoke these words to Pilate during his interrogation during the trial. But the night before Jesus had been having the Passover meal with his disciples. At the close of his meal Jesus broke bread and gave it to his disciples saying "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me." (Luke 22:19). Then he passed the cup around saying: "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you." (Luke 22:20)

It is not long until the disciples began to dispute among themselves which of them would be the greatest in this Kingdom. Can you not grasp the irony of these poor disciples as they argued over who would have the primary position in this new Kingdom? Jesus had instructed them earlier in the meal that he would not eat with them again until the fulfillment of The Kingdom of God took place. So, they were positioning themselves to be somewhere at the top of the heap when this Kingdom does arrive. Even though Jesus had made it very clear in all that he had taught over the past three years that "His Kingdom would not be of this world." They still did not get it!

I can almost see the chagrin on the face of Jesus as he hears the discussion around the table. Here he is facing death and they are vying for positions of importance in the new order. Here he was facing rejection by the crowds and they were

arguing about who would get to sit at Christ's right hand. So Jesus jumps into the battle.

Look, he says, you are used to a world where there are Kings and Benefactors. You are used to a world where someone is over you and perhaps you can be over someone else.

That is not how it is going to be in The Kingdom of God and you should not be like the world all around you. The greatest among you should be the least. The one who rules should be the one who serves. My Kingdom is not of this world. Look at me. I have been among you as one who serves. Did you see me as one who grabs for power? Did you see me as one who played to the crowds? Did you see me as one who craved notoriety? You have stood by me in all my trials, for heavens sake! Do you not understand? My Kingdom is not of this world!

And that is the Kingdom I am conferring on you. A kingdom that replicates the one that God, my father, conferred on me. If those disciples had any doubt as to the kind of Kingdom to expect it should have been dispelled at this point. Forget about your traditional worldly kingdoms. Forget about holding a prestigious position in the new Kingdom. Forget about who among you is going to be first. The first shall be last and the last shall be first.

So, as we gather around this table tonight we need to shake ourselves loose from thinking of God's Kingdom in terms of this world's definitions. They just will not work for the Kingdom to which Christ calls us. As we gather around

this table tonight we are called to a Kingdom where service is the hallmark and humility is the watchword. The Kingdom to which we belongs has a King who sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty.

And we are servants to all of God's people because the King is a servant. And we can do no better than to empty ourselves and serve this world, all of the created order as a Kingdom of servants. What would the world be like if we ever effectively communicated that Kingdom and lived as servants within God's Kingdom?

Come to the table, all you His Servants.

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