

Servant and Glory
St Swithin's 20.01.2019
Luke 22:14-30

INTRO - SLIDE 1 - LOOK TO JESUS

- Committing to journeying through the book of Luke in 2019 to focus on the person and life of Jesus.
- To come to know Him more clearly, love Him more dearly and follow Him more nearly.
- You may be surprised to find that we're jumping ship this morning from Luke 2 to Luke 22. That's not a typo. I have had it on my heart for a couple of months now to speak on this amazing moment in Jesus' life and often rotas are an algorithm more than Einstein can handle, so it just turns out that I can slot in here.

INTRO - SLIDE 2 - REMARKABLE MEAL

Well this must be the most remarkable meal in history.

More remarkable than the napkin-scrawling affair of the first lunchtime meeting to discuss Toy Story 1 in Richmond, California

More remarkable than any royal wedding reception at Winsor Castle

More remarkable than any Brexit-induced food-fight this Christmas, or perhaps in the Cabinet Room at No 10. Downing Street.

Over 2000 years this last supper meal has been relived by billions of people.

Monumental is an understatement.

I wonder if any mealtime discourse has been more heavily studied or caused more division, or unity for that matter.

Question

If you were celebrating the passover festival with Jesus and you knew how your words would be recalled for millennia, what topic of conversation would you bring to the table?

Explore

Well why the disciples choose this moment a "debate" about which of them is the greatest I do not know, but it looks at best, horrifically insensitive.

Perhaps they've seen John resting on Jesus lap (as described in John's Gospel) and are jealous.

Perhaps John started gloating about it and it's got everyone writhing.

Perhaps they're pitching for team leader once Jesus is gone.

Perhaps they are trying to distance themselves as far as possible from Judas and this foul betrayal.

Maybe this is some kind of weird martyr syndrome. They know their lives are all on the line here. They want reassurance that their sacrifice has been of the highest value.

Perhaps this kind of comparison is their way of grading themselves as they graduate from the rabbinic school of Jesus. But to be honest, in moments like these it really doesn't look like much has been learned at all.

Interpret

One of their best friends, who they have shared life with and risked everything for every day for three years, clearly the greatest among them, is imminently facing the most violent of executions and simply wants to spend one last evening eating with them...

... and they're stroking their egos.

It's revolting.

Fact

Some translations say they're having a dispute

Others a contention

A bickering

An argument

Fact

The greek wording here, which I would cannot pretend I know how to pronounce, actually means "A love of strife rose up between them."

Point

A love of strife, not of service.

SLIDE 3 - SERVANT AND SACRIFICE

Interpret

Here Jesus has shown, through the breaking of bread, the pouring of wine and by the tending to their dirty feet, the sheer weight of his responsibilities and loving

service. And they do little to console him. They are more interested in the illustriousness of their own titles than the weight of their Messiah's mantle.

Do not get me wrong, I think these early followers are the most remarkable of people. It almost feels like their moments folly in the gospels are included not as norm, but as a literary device to prove a point plain. On this occasion, it's that Jesus shows himself to be a servant and a sacrifice they miss it, opting for notions of grandeur instead. Boy, have they got this wrong. And it's not the first time.

Fact

When Jesus predicts his death in Luke 9, they deliberated over exactly the same topic. It's uncanny. Jesus talks about dying and they create a scoreboard. Only last time, the discussion is described in a less heated away.

Metaphor

But now it seems the issue is at boiling point.

Interpret

Their capacity for kindness when their dearest friend has just experienced the gravest betrayal and faces the death penalty has been completely usurped by their desire for self-promotion.

Now I realise that we're spending this year in the book of Luke to focus on Jesus, and all I seem to have done so far is have a go at the disciples, but I think the reason their mistake bothers me so is because it's a mistake that is so easily made.

Point

As God's disciples, we can so easily become so focussed on the things God has promised to us, and the things we have fought so long for, or risked for... that we end up loving strife and not service.

Apply

We can sometimes talk about ministry, church, family, job descriptions, contracts, cars, phones, homes, relationships in terms of what we're feel entitled to and avoid Kingdom responsibilities that might feel are below us.

We can retreat from relationships that appear costly.

We simply don't have time for that needy family member, or that friend who rides our patience.

We can get caught up in consume and consume and consume.
You know. Let's invest in luxuries because we're exhausted and our consumption is a coping mechanism and we can tell ourselves we've earned it.

Story

Last year a friend of mine was chatting to his mentor about battling with pornography and lust. What struck me was that the mentor talked about how that struggle can become harder as you get older.

In essence, he said that as you have to carry more responsibility in life, and the weight and stress of it, it can be easy to feel that you've earned the right to have what you want.

Empathy

Entitlement and bitterness can be fuelled by striving or suffering, particularly when endured over a long time.

It can build to the point where we feel entitled to things that are below what we were made for and then we're just adding to our problems.

Bible

The truth is that God entrusts us with responsibilities and everything we have is an act of grace.

James 1 tells us that every good and perfect gift comes from the Father of heavenly lights.

Interpret

That includes the work, roles and relationships. Adam and Eve had the responsibility of stewarding the garden before they ate the forbidden fruit. We are made by a God who works and in the image of a God who works. Work is good.

And as He is in good relationship, so He created us for relationship and created relationships for us. Relationships are good.

And we see throughout Scripture that God allots roles to individuals and tribes, calling them to step out and serve in particular fields, entrusting them with authority. Responsibilities are good.

Sometimes these things become broken and dysfunctional, but every good and perfect gift comes from the Father of heavenly lights.

The relationships, work and responsibilities that we have are most likely there by grace, and most definitely not by right.

Jesus knew this. Jesus knew what grace looked like.

It's not here in Luke, but you will find it in John's account of the Last Supper...

Jesus got on his knees, laid aside his garments, wrapped a towel around His waist and tended to their dirty feet.

Why? In John's retelling, John says Jesus did this because He knew everything had been put under His feet.

Knowing that He was from God and returning to God. Knowing His identity. Knowing He had all authority, power, glory, dominion.

Metaphor

Knowing creation was His footstool, He reversed roles. He preceded to get low, prop up creation and He tended to her dirty feet.

SLIDE 4 - SERVANT AT HIS CORE

Point

Jesus served out of who He was.

Bible - Philippians 2:5-8

In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus, who being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death— even death on a cross!

Interpret

It wasn't simply... "oh I like being glorious and perfect and I feel sorry for these folk who can't find shoes that keep the sand out. I feel like blessing them with a foot washing would be a decent favour."

Out of knowing who He is, He served.

Metaphor

Servanthood was not a pity-inspired choice for a 30-year old on an over-extended gap year.

Point

Servanthood is at the core of who Jesus is.

More than that, His servanthood and His glory are indistinguishable character traits.

Sure there is a side to His glory and his power that might seem somehow so magnificent that it's not really like washing feet. But it is.

I mean He holds a universe of over 46 billion light years in the palm of His hand. Imagine tending to that night and day. Tending to the every tweet of every bird and even the tweets of Donald Trump. It's no small feat. I'd have retired after day 1. That's a mantle only He can handle.

Story

In the previous church I belonged to I started out as an intern. There was a lot of cleaning toilets and moving chairs and helping with youth work and kids work, but very little responsibility in the first few months. Just very long days. After a few months of being there, my boss came to talk to me about the church's plan to church plant and how the chap who headed up our worship team would be going as part of the team. This was 2 years away and he felt I had a lot of potential and would love to see me step up and grow into the role gradually, so that when Chris left I potentially could head things up. I was rather taken aback by the opportunity since I'd not been there long, but it would be true to say that the church believed in me and invested in me and really gave me every chance to make some mistakes and grow into it and for that I am very grateful.

The plan seemed to go ahead quite naturally. I mean I was 20 and clueless and protected from a lot and there were mistakes, but nothing life or death. I gradually took things on, one team, one service at a time; accruing confidence in myself and the trust of those I led. I'd run training days and began leading at bigger events. I was one of the youngest worship pastors in the country and leading in a big church. People from elsewhere started to take notice of the impact I'd made and I was having conversations about regional and national initiatives. When 2 years came up and Chris left, I thought I was ready for the whole role.

Yet the leadership discerned I wasn't quite ready. I took it so personally. Why don't they trust me? How could they say that? What am I missing? Can't they see how hard I've worked, how much I've grown, what a difference I've made?

And you see the very fact that was my response proves they were right. I wasn't quite ready. My ego had snuck in. This is ministry and I'd forgotten the posture of a servant. I'd felt I deserved a title and I had not really taken on board the weight of the mantle.

Interpret

What I think is remarkable about Jesus, is whilst the disciples might be squabbling over titles and Judas is shifting his allegiances and calvary becomes ever more immanent, the pain of death, the weight of sin, the humiliation and the torture, Jesus thinks not first of Himself, but of His friends.

He's comforting them and He's giving them a framework for understanding what will happen, with the words "broken *for you*... shed *for you*.... for the forgiveness of sins."

Such compassion

SLIDE 5 - REMEMBER ME

Bible

Here in Luke's account, we have these perhaps very familiar words, "Remember me."

Fact

Whilst there is no ancient Hebrew word for history, there is for memory and it appears over 300 times in the Old Testament.

Cultural memory was central to the Jewish faith.

For Jews, every festival, every Sabbath, they would remember what God had done and so often in their history they would become lost and in trouble when they failed to remember.

Opinion

Jonathan Safran Foer describes memory as the Jews sixth sense.

Fact

It's how they navigate and understand what they encounter.

Opinion

They have an old phrase, "Memory is a part of me. History is apart from me."

Opinion

"It's almost a sacramental event to remember and to call the past into the present and to savour it and to recalibrate their lives in light of it." - Ponsonby

Interpret

We can let the story of the Servant shape our story

Jesus calls for the centuries to come, *remember my broken body.*

For generations, give thanks for my blood poured out.

Eat this bread and drink this wine.

Make my story a part of you.

For my sacrifice is eternally for you.

This is my body broken for you.

This is my blood shed for you.

Those impaling nails are for you, each lashing for you, each spat, each slander, my body strung out for you.

I lay it all down for you.

This act of service, though painful to face, is glorious and needs recounting.

You cannot afford to skip this chapter of my story guys for you see, my service to you is my glory revealed.

If I am to be glorified for anything, if I am to be remembered for anything, if my greatness is to be marked by anything, let it be this. Let it be this.

SLIDE 6 - SERVICE AND GLORY

Point

Can you see... His servanthood and His glory are indistinguishable.

Glory is found kneeling in the dirt, with a towel wrapped around His waist, a bowl topped up to the brim with water and soap in hand.

Interpret

And notice Jesus does not rebuke them for having the argument that I am so offended by. He's not saying it's inherently wrong to aspire to greatness. In fact at the end of the passage he says

Bible - Luke 22:28-30

“You have stayed with me in my time of trial. And just as my Father has granted me a Kingdom, I now grant you the right to eat and drink at my table in my Kingdom. And you will sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”

Bible

In John 17 He says that He has given the believers glory.

Interpret

He is totally comfortable with glory and greatness being imparted to His disciples. He trusts them with it.

But what does this greatness look like?

Service.

On our knees, in the dirt, towel around our waist, bowl topped up, soap in hand service.

Empathy

Often when people talk to me about vocation, they talk about all the factors that go into trying to decipher where the right place is to be.

Financial Implications

Personal Relationships

Relationships that come with the role

What impact the opportunity promises

What they're gifted at

What they're passionate about

How much time will it cost

Whether moving is a factor

Whether they feel torn away from what they're doing now

Do I stay or do I go?

Oh it's so agonising. What's the most important factor?

How can I be sure that I am called?!!

Observation

Can I just make an observation?

Who's really sure? I mean 100% sure?

Even when I look back with retrospect, I'm still not always sure.

There are so many ways we can choose to spend our time.

Sometimes we can be so afraid about making the wrong choice.

Sometimes we are waiting for better offers or conditions or until we have everything perfectly in place before we can step into our higher, exciting, God-given calling.

Interpret

Moses didn't sound that convinced at the burning bush did he?
The job description did not win Him over.
He wasn't even the best fit for the job.

Question

So what is the one key ingredient we need to move us? What is it?

Bible: John 13:3-5

Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.

Question

Do we know God is with us, He has given His Kingdom to us, He is where we come from and He is where we are heading?

So are we prepared for the lowly, dirty, on our knees, towel around our waist, bowl topped up, soap in hand service?

Interpret

Jesus had everything in place.
Everything was under His feet.
All the power heaven could muster in His hands.
There are so many magnificent ways He could have lived that out.
And yet He chose to take the form of a servant and wash feet, comfort his friends and serve a meal.

Point

His servanthood and His glory are indistinguishable.

Apply

So next time you're changing that diaper at 3am without a thought for yourself, do you know you're displaying glory.
When you're patiently having the difficult conversation with a loved one who's refusing help, you're displaying glory.

When you pick up an extra spreadsheet at work so a colleague can get home on time and see their spouse, you're remembering His grief.

When you sit down next to the homeless person and share life stories and your lunch, you're remembering Christ's broken body.

When there's an untapped gift in you, but you still simply love to bless the church and will happily mop the floors and clear up, you're giving thanks for that Christ's life poured out.

Interpret

Jesus made no attempt to accrue followers with the best pay packets, benefits or job descriptions.

He was looking for friends who were more interested in what was in His heart than what He had in His hands.

Explain

And it's not that we should be always suspicious of promotions, or favour or luxury or provision. God is in the habit of lavishing generously on His kids those very good and perfect gifts. But if we do, why do we want those things?

Question

Whether your position is high or low in life, are you living out of a love of strife or a love for the Servant.

Do you live out of knowing who you are and how much He loves you, or are you straining some kind of accolade?

Do you know that today there's a wide open space at the Servant's glorious table just for you and He'll even tend to you dirt?