

“But I am among you as one who serves.”

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[0:00] That by its preaching. And by our living. We may faithfully set it forth. And show it accordingly. Through Jesus Christ our Lord.

! Amen. Please be seated. The Church of Christ should be a place. Where we take every opportunity to celebrate. To rejoice in the unfolding fulfillment of our Lord's promise.

To establish and to advance this kingdom through his church. And in the Anglican tradition in particular. We do this by faithfully keeping the church calendar.

The church here is divided into three categories of feast days. The first is the principal feast days. Among which are Easter. Ascension.

[1:09] Pentecost. Trinity Sunday. Christmas Epiphany. Those are the principal feast days that we commemorate and we celebrate. Some of those are movable feast days like Easter. Some of them are fixed like Christmas.

And Epiphany. And then we have what we call. The second category of feast days are. Red letter days. Today is a red letter day. These are early days.

On which we commemorate. The work of God. In the lives of New Testament saints. Apostles and prophets. And evangelists. These are called red letter days.

Because the names of these saints. Originally appeared in red letters. In the book of common prayer. And then the third category are. Black letter days. Optional commemoration.

Of saints. Primarily in church history. Primarily in the first five centuries. Of church history. Such as St. Polycarp. Or St. Augustine thing.

[2:09] So these are the three categories of feast days. There are two that. We are. We are. We are. Required to observe. Which are the principal feast days.

And the red letter days. And the last one is optional. And so as I said before. Today is. One of those red letter days. Today. August 24.

Is when we remember. And give thanks to God. For the life. Of. For Solomon. Also known as Nathaniel. In John's gospel. He was named.

Among the twelve apostles. Called by Jesus. And according to tradition. He traveled. After Jesus. Death. Burial. And resurrection. And ascension. When the.

When the apostles. In obedience to the Lord's command. To go to the ends of the earth. With the gospel. But Solomon. Traveled. According to church tradition. To the east. To the pasting empire.

[3:03] And he moved on to India. And to Armenia. To preach the gospel of Jesus Christ. He's believed to have died. A martyr's death.

In Armenia. We have little ones with us. This morning. So I wouldn't describe. The nature of his martyrdom. To you. But if you've seen. Statues of St. Bartholomew.

You might. Might give you a clue. Well he died. A martyr's death. In Armenia. And through his faithful service. To God. Armenia. Would later. In the 3rd century.

Become the first nation. To officially adopt Christianity. As its religion. I know Lynn is happy about that fact. Well.

Today. Today's epistle. And gospel readings. Do not name Bartholomew directly. In our readings. But they do speak. Of the apostles. In general. In ways. Deeply fitting.

[3:58] For this day's commemoration. The epistle. The epistle. The epistle. Shows. The apostles. The apostles. Filled with God's power. That reading. That we had read. In Acts. That. That. That. That carol. Reck for us.

In Acts. Shows. The apostles. Filled with God's power. And filled. With God's power. They Damn. Both. In the temple. In the temple. Ah. Stead.

preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ. And attending the preaching of the gospel was the Holy Spirit's power to heal the sick, bringing blessings to the world the world has never known. The gospel shows that such power is not about recognition as it often is in the world. If you have power in the world, you're recognized.

And then you use that power to your own ends to greater increase your own notoriety and importance. But not so with the apostles. Not so with the Lord.

[4 : 56] The gospel shows that such power is not about recognition as it is often in the world, but it is about self-denial and about love of God and love for God. And so we see after Pentecost, the apostles performed many miracles, united in heart and purpose.

They gathered in Solomon's porch. So great was the awe surrounding these apostles that no one dared to join them. They recognized these men as filled with the power of God and they treated them with the appropriate respect.

Yet the people honored them. And many came to believe in the Lord through their preaching. The sick were laid in the streets, Luke tells us in Acts, hoping that even Peter's shadow might fall on them and bring healing.

Of course, it wasn't just Peter alone. It was all the apostles gathered together preaching and proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ. Bartholomew among them. Crowds came from surrounding towns, bringing the sick and those tormented by evil spirits.

And all, Acts tells us, were healed. And what a vivid picture this is of humanity under the gospel.

This is what happens when the gospel shapes a society, a world.

[6 : 12] All of us sick in soul, helpless in ourselves. Yet looking up in faith, that even the faint touch of Christ's church, through the gospel, might bring healing.

And perhaps many of you here, I've been touched by that gospel message. And you find healing for your soul. You find peace with God.

The gospel reminds us of our duty then. Having received so much from God, we must give freely in service to others. That's what the gospel reading this morning is about.

We must give freely, expecting nothing in return. But by this, we resemble our Lord, who gave His life as a ransom for many. So the context for this gospel reading, about who is the greatest among the apostles, the context for this is, for when this dispute arose, was at the Last Supper.

And what was going on around that time? Jesus. Remember, if you read Luke's account, or maybe even John's account, Jesus had just done what?

[7 : 25] He has washed His disciples' feet. And then He had just instituted the sacrament of Holy Communion. Saying, This is My body, given for you.

This is My blood, shed for you. Jesus had just done all of these things. And at that moment, after observing all of this, the apostles fell into an argument over who will be the greatest.

How strange this seems. At the very moment the Lord was about to be betrayed and crucified, they were quarreling among each other. But who has the best status?

And who should get the best seat? This shows to us that our father apostles were from grasping the true nature of God's kingdom, of Christ's kingdom, and the measure of greatness in that kingdom.

They were still quite far from truly grasping it. This was the second time, by the way, that they were having this, at least recorded in the gospel. This is the second recording in the gospel of them having this dispute about who was the greatest.

[8 : 39] The first time was when Jesus set his face towards Jerusalem, when they were still in Galilee. This is when Jesus had just told them that he was going to Jerusalem, that he was going to be betrayed and handed over to death.

It was immediately after that, in the first instance, in Luke's gospel, that they started arguing about who was the greatest. And this second account, this second quarrel, is only recorded for us in Luke's gospel.

But Luke has shown us that Jesus' life of service and his death on the cross was sacrificial. It was through this sacrificial death of Jesus, this servant-like service, even unto death, that Christ established his eternal rule and reign.

It was the cross that was the means of his greatest victory and his ascension as King of kings and Lord of lords. The humiliation of the cross was the means by which Jesus conquered and established his kingdom.

And this teaches us that God's kingdom operates by a value system utterly different from the world's. Leadership, power, and greatness in Christ's church must look radically different from what we see around us.

[9:56] And so let's look in verse 24. By the way, I do invite you to open your Bibles on page 1048 of your pew Bible, this gospel reading, page 1048.

Let's look there in verse 24. Luke tells us that a dispute also arose among them as to which of them was to be regarded as the greatest. And then in verse 25, Jesus is describing the reality of the world in which we live.

He said to them, the kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them. And those in authority over them are called benefactors. How is power exercised in the world?

Through political maneuvering. That's how power is exercised. Through military might and wealth in service of both. That is how power is exhibited in the world.

That is how power is exercised in the world that we live in. This is how kings of nations, presidents, and prime ministers of the world employ power. Political parties spend billions nowadays to win and retain office.

[11:10] They court the wealthy and the well-connected so that they can have access to money that's needed to remain in power. That's the world we live in. Nothing has changed from Jesus' day.

Might makes right. That's the philosophy of the world. The saber-rattling, the endless race for advanced weaponry.

All of this is the way the world functions and power is established and power is maintained. And this is not only the reality in national or international politics but also the reality on school playgrounds where bullies get the last word.

So right from infancy we've learned the ways of the world. The weak are preyed upon all around us. The currency of ridicule and shame is traded easily on social media and mainstream media. And with the advent of social media we now live in a virtual playground actually where such bullying never ends.

[12:28] That's the way the world functions. And Jesus accurately describes the way the world functions. The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them. Those in authority are often called benefactors.

And Jesus having provided this accurate analysis of how power operates in the world Jesus now continues in verse 26 to describe how power operates in his kingdom.

Look with me in verse 26. Jesus says to them but not so with you rather let the greatest among you become as the youngest and the leader as one who serves.

The world may act as it does but for those who bear Christ's name it must be different. The path to greatness is the path of humility and self-abasement in the service of God and in the service of others for the sake of the gospel.

That's the path of Christ's followers. Earlier in Luke chapter 9 when the apostles first quarreled about who was the greatest in the kingdom Jesus took to himself a little child he took a little child in his arms and said to his disciples to the apostles he says whoever welcomes this little child in my name welcomes me and whoever welcomes me welcomes him who sent me for whoever is least among you this one is great.

[13:59] that is Jesus' economy of greatness. The leader must be a minister. The word minister actually means servant.

So when you we heard prime minister it really means first servant although the world doesn't think of it that way. That's what the word means. So Jesus says the leader must be a servant.

This is the way of my kingdom. This is how greatness is measured in my kingdom Jesus says. This is how we as Christians are to conduct ourselves as ambassadors of Christ.

How are we to live out this kingdom value then? Is that church for instance marked by Christ's standard of greatness? Or is it marked by the world's standard of greatness?

Well according to our Lord true greatness is found in the one who makes himself or herself available to others. Not claiming status but ministering through the gifts and resources the Lord has provided for him or her for the sake and the good of the church and of others around them.

[15:12] And in this kind of ministering there is no reciprocity. There is no balance book in which we keep record of what we've done. In the church of Christ no one is a benefactor.

That word benefactor means something in Jesus' day. It means something in our day as well. Just imagine someone who is well off and used their resources to gather influence, to gain followers, people who will gather around them.

That's the way of the world. To gather patrons around patrons who gather sycophants around them because of the way they dole out their benefactions. That is the way of the Roman world.

This is the way even now, still currently in our world. But in Christ's church there are no benefactors. We don't serve one another in order to keep records and to gain influence for ourselves.

We don't dole out favors to gain influence or power over our brothers and sisters in Christ. Instead, we are all servants under one great benefactor. There is only one benefactor in Christ's church.

[16:31] That is the captain of our salvation, Jesus Christ himself. Bishop Julian said in a sermon at the consecration of Bishop Mark two Saturdays ago, he said this to Bishop Mark before he was ordained as bishop.

In his sermon he says, you have not come today to be enthroned but to be commissioned. This is not a ministry of celebrity but of cruciform love.

That's the manner of greatness. That's the path of greatness in Christ's church. This cross shaped ministry is not only required of bishops but it's required of all of us, members of the body of Christ.

And so brothers and sisters, do you aspire to greatness in God's kingdom? Do you? You should.

But if you do aspire to greatness in God's kingdom, I invite you to take up your towel and stoop and wash your brother's feet because that's the path to greatness.

Serve your sister. Claim no status but instead become like a child. There are no lords and chiftings in the body of Christ.

[17:49] There are only servants. To climb the ladder of success in Christ's kingdom is to descend further into service. That's the path to greatness.

In verse 27, Jesus emphasizes how countercultural this kingdom standard is. He says in verse 27, who is the greater one? The one who reclines the table or the one who serves?

We already know the answer to that. The greater one is the one who reclines the table. The one who stories around serving the one who reclines the table is the lesser one. So Jesus says, is it not the one who reclines the table?

It's a rhetorical question. We all know who is the greater one. If we look at it, you see two people, one is sitting at a table, the other one is scurrying around serving him. The greater one is the one sitting at a table. Jesus says, that's the way that's visible to anyone.

It's apparent to anyone. But Jesus now shows the cultural nature of his kingdom. The Lord of the universe, the one who made the stars in the heavens, the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords, says to his apostles, I am among you as one who serve.

[19:07] Although in worldly terms, the one who reclines the table is greater, Jesus comes to us as one who serve.

The word for servant here is the root word for deacon. And that word deacon means a table waiter, someone who waits a table.

A waiter. In the world, rulers seek honor and are called benefactors. But in Christ's kingdom, greatness is found in service. Jesus says, I am among you as one who serves.

Remember again that he just knelt as a servant to wash their feet. And the next day, he would do an even greater act of service. He would give his life on the cross as a ransom for them and for us. And Christ's joy is not in amassing power. Christ's joy is in saving others. He did not consider his equality with God something to be exploited, even though he could have for his own benefit.

[20:23] instead, our Lord relinquished his divine privilege. To what end? In order to save you and me. He relinquished his divine privilege in order to meet our greatest need, the forgiveness of our sins.

And so brothers and sisters, true joy for us then also lies not in amassing power or recognition in the world. That's not where true joy lies.

Look at the rich, those who have notoriety in the world. Look at the famous. True joy is in self-giving service.

True joy is in following the example of our Lord. And then Christ promises that it is not all in vain. the world may not recognize you.

You may not seek the recognition of the world that you do this service. But the king sees his faithful subjects and he rewards them in kind. Verse 28, Jesus says to them, you are those who have

stayed with me in my trials.

[21:42] And I assign to you, remember he's speaking to the apostles here, I assign to you as my father assigned to me a kingdom that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

The apostles were slow to understand, yet Jesus called them away from selfish ambition to the greater task of going forth with his gospel to establish his church. Even while correcting their pride, he spoke to them with tenderness.

He did not focus on their failures, but on their faithfulness. Thanks be to God that he does not focus on our failures. He only asked our faithfulness.

He says to them, you are those who have stayed with me in my trials. And then he promised them a share in his kingdom to eat and drink at his table, to sit on thrones and to share his glory.

There is an ultimate point to our faithfulness in the service of Christ the King. Service in his kingdom will be rewarded. service in his kingdom is not pointless.

[22:53] This is Jesus' assurance to his beloved apostles. Don't doubt but believe that there is a real kingdom, a greater kingdom than the kingdoms of this world that is doomed to destruction.

And in that kingdom it is marked by greatness. Greatness is marked by service. Those who serve faithfully, following Christ's example, will be rewarded.

And this points to our deep union with Christ, brothers and sisters, of which he prayed. Remember that Jesus has prayed this prayer. He prayed, as you father are in me and I in you, let them also be one in us.

That is our Lord's eye-precely prayer. Christ is the one true foundation. foundation. Yet in a sense, the apostles themselves are called foundations.

Because it is upon their preaching that the church was laid. For it is in their service and faithfulness that we see God's grace at work in the world and the gospel go forth.

[24:02] And this grace was so wonderfully at work in Bartholomew. That he, this apostle, who was formerly arguing with his brothers, but was the greatest after Jesus' resurrection and ascension, now traveled to hostile pagan lands in the service of his Lord.

As a faithful herald of that same gospel. He would die in those distant lands at the ends of those he came to preach the gospel to. He would die.

He would give his very life. And by the world's standards, he would be considered a failure and a wasted life. The wretched of the earth.

And yet the Lord says of such people, that's those who are great in my kingdom. That's the mark of those who are esteemed. The Lord highly esteemed this saint of his.

And in his mercy, in God's mercy, his martyr's blood blood that was shed in that distant land, eventually bore fruit and led to a whole nation in the third century for the first time confessing Christ as Savior and Lord.

[25:21] So what does this mean for you and me? Why is this appointed passage for this feast day? What does it mean for us today? I think first it shows us the immense privilege of belonging to the apostolic church.

Because you and I are also beneficiaries of Tholome's faithfulness and the rest of the apostles' faithfulness. We belong to this apostolic church with Christ Jesus as the chief cornerstone and with the foundations laid once and for all upon the prophets and apostles.

second, it reminds us that such privilege can only be kept through humility. Look at the life of the apostles.

They were looking for worldly status and worldly standards, recognition from the world. But when Christ fully gripped them, when they were gripped with the treasure of the gospel of Jesus Christ, they forsook the world and they gave their very lives, all of them, for the sake of the gospel, in humility, not in amassing power, but in giving it away, in service.

Brothers and sisters, the divisions of the church today, we must recognize that most of our divisions in the church today are the result of pride and selfishness. We cannot heal the church's outward brokenness on our own.

[27:02] We must turn to God in humility, following the example of our Lord Jesus Christ and his apostles. Inwardly, each of us can preserve the spirit of apostolic fellowship through this same humble service.

Humility guards our unity with Christ. I'm going to say that again. Humility guards our unity with Christ and with one another. Humility takes the path of gospel fidelity and gospel priority. And so with humility comes reverence and obedience. A Christian should love and respect the tradition in which God has placed him, just as he honors his parents or his country. And so if God grants us greater light, it should be received humbly as we receive that greater light. We shouldn't receive it arrogantly. We shouldn't judge one another harshly. We should, in this way, trust God to guide us into truth while keeping us safe in the essentials of salvation. Brothers and sisters, the path to greatness is through service. [28 : 15] The path of humility is always in Christ's church, the path of safety. And as Jesus says, blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

Let us pray. Almighty and everlasting God, we did give to your apostle Bartholomew grace truly to believe and to preach your word.

We pray now that you will grant us, your church, to love that same word that he preached and he believed. And that we also will proclaim the same gospel and we will receive it through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.