

“I CONFER ON YOU A KINGDOM”

A Sermon for the 6th Sunday after Pentecost, June 26k, 2016

Text: Luke 9:51-62

Our gospel today is about focus. Single-mindedness. Purity of heart.

“Follow me,” Jesus used to say. He was attracting followers left, right, and center. He was beginning to be popular in Galilee. People would walk up to him and say “I will follow you wherever you go.” People were leaving work and family to follow him.

So Jesus said a few words about what it must be like to follow him. To be a part of his enterprise.

He told them “No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.”

That seems harsh. If you are like me, and I know you are, you like to look back. The past means a lot to you. That’s why you take photos, right? So you can look back!

The way Jesus talks in this gospel reading, you could be forgiven for thinking is an extremist. Since you are certainly not an extremist, you might prefer to take Jesus with a grain of salt. You want to dilute his more extreme sayings like “take up your cross and follow me.” Also “Turn the other

cheek,” and “the first must be last.” Jesus is not an easy leader to follow. So you’re not surprised if he says “The Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head,” but you’re not sure if you want to give up your favorite pillow to be a Christian. You think, “Do I want that sort of a leader? Can Jesus be taken seriously?”

In our gospel Jesus says we need to keep our heads screwed on right about what is the absolutely, positively, most essential thing in life. But he doesn’t say, within this reading, exactly what it means to be in this kingdom he mentions, for which we are only fit if we can keep our focus and keep plowing ahead, so to speak.

To make that clear I need to borrow another saying of Jesus from another part of Luke. That verse never gets read on Sundays! Despite its tremendous importance, it didn’t make it into the lectionary! So listen up, because even if you attend church for the next sixty years you will probably never hear this verse again. It could become your favorite verse if you catch its drift. It is Luke 22:29-30. Jesus says:

And I confer on you, just as my Father has conferred on me, a kingdom, so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

I know what you're thinking. You don't like the bit about Jesus promising you that you will sit on thrones judging anybody, much less the twelve tribes of Israel. It sounds confusing, if not anti-Semitic. I will explain, but first let me read it again:

And I confer on you, just as my Father has conferred on me, a kingdom, so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

Luke 22:29-30 helps us see what it is we have to keep clear about. It helps us remember that **the gospel** is everything, in the Jesus enterprise. This is what we have to keep in mind, in all we do. This has to override every other consideration in our lives. Jesus Christ is conferring on us a kingdom. So that we may eat and drink at his table in that kingdom. And we are supposed to sit on thrones as judges.

That's what it is about. That's what we are not supposed to become distracted from.

Now, what about that "judging" part? Jesus confers on us a kingdom so we can "judge"?

Doesn't he teach "Judge not"?

Yes, but here he is referring to the relationship between judges and Israel. If you look at the book of Judges, you will find that the judges in Israel, back when "the twelve tribes" were still united, which was ages ago, were not people who went around policing the law. The judges were *the people the Lord sent to deliver his people when they went astray and were being swallowed up by their enemies, etc.* When calamity struck, God appointed a judge to go and deliver his people.

That's the judging Jesus wants us to do. Judges in Israel were eventually replaced by kings, which was a big problem, because, as you know, kings start making it all about themselves and their power and glory and fighting wars and building palaces. Kings take over from God, because they forget their authority comes from God.

Whereas judges never forgot that; they never made themselves the center of attention. They just delivered the tribes of Israel. People like Gideon, or left-handed Ehud, or the woman Deborah. They were not special so they could be special; they were appointed and

anointed to deliver all of God's children.

So, there. Jesus is giving you and me a kingdom so we can be a people who are like those people whom God preferred to kings, who preceded the kings, who simply mediated God's salvation to the world.

But Jesus also says he is conferring on us a kingdom so that we may eat and drink at his table in his kingdom.

There is no greater event in the world than communion. Nothing that happens in the world is of greater significance and value, than the people of God sitting at God's table with one another.

What could beat eating and drinking at Jesus' royal table with your brothers and sisters who share the mission and ministry and blessing of God? If the great Jesus lived and died to give us this meal, must we not see it as something of great value and meaning?

Friends eat together. Families eat together. As a sign of unity and love. And among all the eating and drinking you do, be sure to eat and drink at the high table of the one who (as he himself says in Luke) "came eating and drinking," and who made a point of eating and drinking with all comers? Could anything be greater?

Jesus has gone out into the highways and byways, and compelled us to come in. As Paul says in Ephesians 2, "He makes us sit together in the heavenly places," that is, where Christ is present, in Communion. Jesus makes us sit together. That is a gift he died and is dying to give us. When we sit together here at 52nd and Central, we are sitting with a couple billion people at the one restaurant called "Chez Jesus."

In good times, celebrate at Jesus' table.
In bad times, celebrate at Jesus' table.
In boring times, come to his table.
Whenever. As often as possible, knowing that he is here with his blessing, the gift of true life.

That Jesus conferred a kingdom on you and me is the absolutely, positively, most essential thing in our life. You will never receive a greater gift than this.

What a gift.

One time Jesus' disciples got distracted and forgot how different the hospitality of the gospel is. They asked Jesus if they should call down fire from heaven upon a Samaritan village which was not interested in him. He rebuked them! Why? They had lost sight of the fact that the fellowship of the kingdom was not in the nature of a requirement but of a gift. We can only offer it, he said. It cannot be forced upon people.

When you and I are distracted or sorrowful, or too happy about something that shouldn't really matter so much; or when we consider our life, or our vocation, or our difficulties; whenever, this one thing we should always keep foremost in our consideration: Jesus is giving us a kingdom. Us. A kingdom. That we may eat and drink at his table in the kingdom. And so we may be a people who, in fellowship with God, minister deliverance to his world. If we can keep that in focus, we cannot lose. Let other things be unclear, but us never make anything more important in our life together, than remembering this gift we have received from our Lord.

Amen.

