

Advent Devotional December 13, 2024

Weekly theme: Peace

Scripture

Luke 22:14-30

14 When the hour came, he took his place at the table, and the apostles with him. 15 He said to them, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; 16 for I tell you, I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." 17 Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he said, "Take this and divide it among yourselves; 18 for I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." 19 Then he took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." 20 And he did the same with the cup after supper, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood. 21 But see, the one who betrays me is with me, and his hand is on the table. 22 For the Son of Man is going as it has been determined, but woe to that one by whom he is betrayed!" 23 Then they began to ask one another, which one of them it could be who would do this.

24 A dispute also arose among them as to which one of them was to be regarded as the greatest. 25 But he said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those in authority over them are called benefactors. 26 But not so with you; rather the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like one who serves. 27 For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one at the table? But I am among you as one who serves.

28 "You are those who have stood by me in my trials; 29 and I confer on you, just as my Father has conferred on me, a kingdom, 30 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.

Devotion

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I have always thought of the commandment "the greatest among you must become like the least, and the leader like one who serves" as a call to "servant leadership" as the proper way to wield power. Like Jesus, each Christian ought to seek to be a servant of others - most especially those in leadership. I wonder what would happen, though, if we flipped the equivalence in this commandment.

I recently learned of the Silent Parade, a peaceful protest in which 10,000 African Americans marched silently along New York City's Fifth Avenue in 1917 as part of an anti-lynching movement. In addition to the silence of the marchers, something notable about this particular protest is that the children led the way in the march, while men brought up the rear. That is, those with the least power were the leaders, even among this marginalized group.

It's easy to dwell on the part of this passage that promises exultation - the "I confer on you a kingdom" part, the "you will sit on thrones judging others" part. Focusing on these, I might think, "I am to be elevated to a place of power, so long as I am Christ-like enough to wield it responsibly. And, well, of course I will be, with God's help." But that, to me, sounds a lot like the disciples' arguing about who among them will be the greatest - which is precisely the thing Jesus is pushing back against.

What if instead of Jesus outlining a program for how to get into power (or how not to be jerks with the power we have), the Lord is helping us to know where to look for direction as we seek to follow him. Not

"the leader should become least" but "the least should become leader." What if, like in the Silent Parade, we took our cue for the direction of our efforts for peace on earth from the little ones, from the "least of these," from the powerless. As the great magi turned their course in the direction of an infant child, perhaps the "least of these" among us can best help us, the Church, discern where God is calling us to go next. Perhaps the little ones best know the way to shalom, after all.

Prayer

God, in your infinite love and wisdom, you chose to live among us as a little child. As we prepare to welcome you anew, give us eyes to see your leading in the least among us. Give us humility and wisdom to lay down our "greatness" at your feet. Teach us ever to follow you, and open our eyes, ears, and hearts to your call to wholeness – that is, peace – on earth. In your name we pray, amen.