

RADICAL SERVANT LEADERSHIP

SEPTEMBER 20, 2009 PENTECOST 15 JEREMIAH 11:18-20

PSALM 54 JAMES 3:13-4:3, 7-8 MARK 9:30-37

DEAR FRIENDS IN CHRIST, GRACE TO YOU AND PEACE FROM GOD OUR FATHER AND OUR LORD AND SAVIOR, JESUS CHRIST. AMEN.

FUNERAL FAMILY.

IT WAS A FEW YEARS AGO NOW THAT WE HAD A FUNERAL HERE FOR A NON-MEMBER FAMILY. AS I RECALL, NOBODY BELONGED TO THIS CHURCH. THEY HAD REQUESTED A MEAL FOLLOWING THE SERVICE AND WE WERE HAPPY TO SERVE THE FAMILY IN THIS WAY. SO AFTER WE HAD BEEN TO THE CEMETARY WE CAME BACK TO THE FELLOWSHIP HALL FOR THE MEAL. IT HAD BEEN A FUNERAL OF THE LAST SURVIVING PARENT IN THIS FAMILY. WAITING FOR THE FAMILY TO REGATHER HERE FOR THE MEAL, I NOTICED BOTH A DAUGHTER AND A SON WERE MISSING. I ASKED SOME OTHER FAMILY MEMBERS ABOUT WHERE THE DAUGHTER WAS, AND THE ANSWER, "OH, SHE AND HER HUSBAND WENT TO SEE THEIR LAWYER" AND THE SON, "HE AND HIS WIFE WENT TO SEE THEIR LAWYER." NOW THAT HARDLY SEEMS LIKE THE APPROPRIATE THING TO DO ON THE DAY OF YOUR PARENT'S FUNERAL. AND YET IT HAPPENED.

CONSIDER THE GOSPEL THIS MORNING WHERE THE DISCIPLES HAD BEEN LIVING FOR THREE YEARS WITH JESUS, PRETTY MUCH DAY IN AND DAY OUT. HE NOW TELLS THEM FOR THE SECOND TIME, "THAT WHERE HIS MINISTRY IS GOING TO TAKE HIM IS THAT HE IS GOING TO BE

BETRAYED, HE WILL BE KILLED, AND ON THE THIRD DAY RISE AGAIN. IT SEEMS FOR THEM IT MOSTLY TRIGGERED THAT THERE WAS NOW GOING TO BE A POWER STRUGGLE FOR WHO WOULD TAKE HIS PLACE AS LEADER – WHO WAS THE GREATEST? HEY THERE IS GOING TO BE AN OPENING. WHO WAS NOW GOING TO BE THE PERSON CALLING THE SHOTS? WHO WOULD GET TO HAVE OTHER PEOPLE LOOK UP TO HIM? WHO WOULD NOW BE AT THE HEAD OF THE LINE? WHO WOULD BE FRONT AND CENTER AT THE HEAD TABLE? HARDLY SEEMS APPROPRIATE DOES IT?

AND YET THAT CAN HAPPEN SO EASILY WHEN THERE IS ANXIETY OR QUESTIONS ABOUT THE FUTURE. THE DEVIL HAS A HAY DAY WITH THOSE KIND OF SITUATIONS. IT JERKS PEOPLE HERE AND THERE. IT SEEMS THEY HAD FORGOTTEN EVERYTHING JESUS HAD TAUGHT THEM OVER THOSE THREE YEARS. AND HERE AGAIN WE SEE THE TRUTH OF WHO THEY ARE AND WHO WE ARE, “WE ARE BY NATURE SINFUL AND CANNOT FREE OURSELVES.” . THE DISCIPLES FELL INTO THAT TRAP JUST LIKE WE DO OURSELVES. YOU CAN’T GET AWAY FROM IT. BUT WE WILL FIGHT THAT NOTION TO OUR DEATH. WE HEAR THIS STORY THIS MORNING AND WE CAN CONCLUDE, “BOY, DO THESE DISCIPLES EVER NEED A SAVIOR.” “BOY, DO WE EVER NEED A SAVIOR.”

ISN’T IT QUITE AN EXAMPLE OF AMAZING GRACE THAT JESUS DOESN’T GIVE UP ON THEM? INSTEAD OF US LOOKING AT THESE DISCIPLES AND SAYING “NAUGHTY, NAUGHTY, NAUGHTY. HOW FOOLISH YOU ARE. WHAT A BUNCH OF MORONS.” IT SHOULD GIVE US HOPE. IT

GIVES ME HOPE. ISN'T IT QUITE AN EXAMPLE OF AMAZING GRACE THAT JESUS DOESN'T GIVE UP ON ME OR YOU? THAT HE DOESN'T JUST TOSS ME ASIDE WHEN I DON'T GET WHAT HE WANTS ME TO GET. OR YOU.

EVERYTHING SEEMS TO BE A TEACHING MOMENT FOR HIM, AND SO HE GOES FROM TELLING ABOUT HIS DEATH TO THIS SUBJECT OF ARGUING ABOUT GREATNESS,. **“WHOEVER WANTS TO BE FIRST MUST BE LAST OF ALL AND SERVANT OF ALL.”** WE WILL DO WELL TO SIT WITH THAT FOR A TIME. **“WHOEVER WANTS TO BE FIRST MUST BE LAST OF ALL AND SERVANT OF ALL.”**

IT SEEMS THAT WHAT JESUS HAS JUST PREDICTED IS HIS ACTING OUT BEING SERVANT OF ALL. IT IS A TURNING OF THINGS UPSIDE DOWN. AND HE TOOK A CHILD – NOTHING MORE THAN A PIECE OF PROPERTY IN THOSE DAYS – PUT THAT CHILD IN THE MIDST OF THEM AND THEN HELD THAT CHILD IN HIS ARMS AND SAID TO THEM, “WHOEVER WELCOMES ONE SUCH CHILD IN MY NAME WELCOMES ME, AND WHOEVER WELCOMES ME WELCOMES NOT ME BUT THE ONE WHO SENT ME.” AND DO YOU SEE WHAT HAPPENS IN THAT ACT? YOU WELCOME A CHILD AND YOU ARE WELCOMING JESUS, AND NOT ONLY JESUS BUT THE ONE WHO SENT HIM. THIS HAS SO BEEN IN MY MIND DURING THESE LAST YEARS AS I HAVE SOUGHT A VISION FOR OUR LIFE TOGETHER. NOT JUST FOR THE CHILDREN OF OUR CONGREGATION BUT THE CHILDREN OF THIS COMMUNITY. I GUESS I SHOULD SPEAK MORE OF IT BUT I SOMETIMES

GET THE SENSE YOU ARE TIRED OF HEARING ABOUT IT. HERE AGAIN IN THIS WORD TODAY IT JUMPS OUT AT ME. "WHOEVER WELCOMES ONE SUCH CHILD IN MY NAME WELCOMES ME, AND WHOEVER WELCOMES ME WELCOMES NOT ME BUT THE ONE WHO SENT ME."

(STEP OUT OF PULPIT)

AT LEAST SOME OF YOU HAVE HEARD BEFORE ABOUT THE STOLE THAT HANGS AROUND MY NECK. IT IS NOT FOR PRETTY. IT IS FOR REMINDER. IT REMINDS ME OF A NIGHT IN WHICH JESUS WASHED THE FEET OF THESE SAME DISCIPLES WHO HAD ARGUED ABOUT WHO WAS THE GREATEST.

(PLACE A TOWEL AROUND YOUR NECK)

THIS TOWEL IS A REMINDER OF SERVANT HOOD. THAT I AM A SERVANT OF OUR LORD. YOU ARE CALLED TO BE ONE AS WELL. BEFORE I AM A SERVANT OF THE CHURCH OR YOUR SERVANT, I AM FIRST OF ALL A SERVANT OF THE WORD. IT SHOULD BE TRUE FOR YOU AS WELL. IN SERVING THAT WORD, I SEEK TO SEE HOW JESUS SERVED AND HOW HE WOULD HAVE ME SERVE. WEARING THE STOLE DOES NOT MEAN THAT I AM TO BE LIKE A STRAY DOG AT A WHISTLER'S CONVENTION WITHOUT ANY DIRECTION. BUT THIS WORD FROM JESUS IS TO BE THE RUDDER TO STEER ME IN MY SERVING. IT IS TO BE THE WIND IN THE SAILS OF THE SHIP. IT IS TO BE THE COMPASS IN THE WANDERING WE DO ON THIS EARTH. IT IS TO BE THE HEALTH FOOD FOR MY SPIRIT. THE GOOD NUTRITION. THE GOOD SEED TO SHAPE MY CONSCIENCE.

IT IS NOT A COMPLIMENT TO US THAT WE ARE ILLITERATE WHEN IT COMES TO THIS WORD. FOR TOO LONG THE CHURCH HAS BLESSED THE ADULTS AND TAUGHT THE CHILDREN. JESUS DID IT THE OTHER WAY AROUND. HE BLESSED THE CHILDREN AND TAUGHT THE ADULTS. IT IS NOT A COMPLIMENT TO US THAT THERE ARE MORE CHILDREN IN SUNDAY SCHOOL ON A SUNDAY MORNING THAN THERE ARE ADULTS IN BIBLE STUDY DURING THE ENTIRE WEEK.

SO I ENCOURAGE YOU THIS DAY TO TAKE JAMES' WORDS TO HEART: HERE IS YOUR INVITATION.
SUBMIT YOURSELVES, THEREFORE TO GOD.
RESIST THE DEVIL, AND HE(WHO POSES AS AN ANGEL OF LIGHT) WILL FLEE FROM YOU. DRAW NEAR TO GOD, AND HE WILL DRAW NEAR TO YOU. AMEN.