

Lenten Midweek Series 2023
The Blood of Christ Speaks
The Dispute and the Blood
Luke 22:24-27

I have made a fool of myself on occasion. You have done the same. I have learned that it can happen at any time, at any place. It has been said that beauty is skin deep but ugly goes all the way to the bone. Do you know what goes all the way to the bone? Ignorance! Our sinful flesh is ignorant. When it comes to anything virtuous, anything divine, anything that genuinely edifies the soul, our sinful flesh is wretchedly ignorant. Whether you are aware of it or not, you carry your pride with you wherever you go. It shouldn't surprise us that we make fools of ourselves. What really hurts is when we do it at an inopportune time. It's one thing to show yourself to be a nimrod in front of your buddies but it's a different story if you should do it front of someone you'd like to impress. It's one thing to show yourself to be a doofus at a party, when spirits are high and others can laugh off your imbecility and move onto the next topic and forget your faux pas. It's another thing to say something stupid at a funeral or in front of your boss. It's one thing to say something half-witted and then you recognize it immediately and apologize. It's another thing when someone has to explain to you what a dolt you are.

The Germans have an idiom, a proverb for which there is no English equivalent. The easier bit is "Eigenlob stinkt." Translated, it means "self-praise stinks." That's pretty straightforward. The harder bit is also more vivid. Selbstbeweihräucherung. It's a mash-up word. Think of a priest swinging incense and shrouding himself in the aroma of self-importance, self-congratulation (that's pride, that's ignorance and it stinks). The Bible is also straightforward. "If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself" (Galatians 6:3). That's what makes the episode in the Upper Room so remarkable. It's Thursday night of Holy Week. Jesus is mere hours away from being arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane, hours away from a bogus midnight trial, hours away from being crucified for being innocent, crucified for being the Son of God, crucified for loving God above all things and loving His neighbor as Himself. The disciples had just received the Lord's body and blood. His unending love was given to them in a sacrament of superlative beauty, superlative grace, superlative humility. And in this setting they can't think of anything better to do than to make fools of themselves. It's astonishing!

St. Luke sets the scene with an uncomplicated phrase, a plain statement that hasn't even a hint of irony. "A dispute arose among them, as to which of them was to be regarded as the greatest" (Luke 22:24). What? Aren't these supposed to be the elite followers of the Lord Christ, men who were super familiar with Jesus' manner, super familiar with His teaching, His character traits? Didn't they know Him? Jesus Christ, true God and true Man, is the greatest thing that this planet has ever known. At creation, He wove the cosmos into being. The disciples saw Him as He walked on the Sea of Galilee. The greatest became the least. Not theoretically, not in some abstract, metaphysical way, but in actuality, in real time and at a real place. God was crucified bearing the sins of humanity. That is why He came. That is what He taught. That is why the sacrament of Holy Communion was instituted. And the Apostles had an argument based on bravado, based on self, emptiness, an argument based on pride. I am so sad for them.

I am sad for us. We neglect the beauty of service. Why? We have so ingested the world's power structure paradigm that we miss what divine beauty lay at the heart of service. We allow our sinful flesh to lead us. It was a teachable moment for the disciples and Jesus conveys the theological core of service magnificently. It truly is one of Scripture's most magnificent lessons. Authority, power, lordship – how do you view these things? Do you subscribe to the world's notion of supremacy or do you see Christ's service to you as the truest expression of greatness. What is that service? Jesus uses an easily relatable image. The person who reclines at table or the one who serves; who is greater? Since time immemorial, the answer has been that the person who reclines at table is greater. And then Jesus tells His disciples about His church, His kingdom, His sacrifice, and His Divine Service. "I am among you as one who serves" (Luke 22:27).

It is an "I AM" statement. The Greek grammar is unmistakable. Jesus takes the Divine Name and uses it to describe what He is doing and what He will continue to do. I am among you as one who serves and I am going to go on being among you as one who serves. I AM WHO I AM AND I AM A SERVANT. God Himself wills to serve you. You need the service He provides. His blood, His very life, His love, His *transforming* love, that is what He serves you with. That love was fully expressed as the King of Glory hung crucified on a cross. Our hate and our lust and our greed and our deceit and our gluttony and our pride transformed Him. His royal body is twisted and torn and He suffers it; for you. That is service. That is the greatest becoming the least. None but the very greatest could take this lowest seat. He is the author of humility. He is the source of every sacrificial notion that man has ever had. He is the culmination, the epitome of self-giving. His cross stands above this whole world.

And He serves you. He is among us as one who serves. He serves you sacramentally. That same night in the Upper Room, the Lord washed His disciples' feet. "Oh, no you don't," Simon said. "You shall never wash my feet" (John 13:8). Simon Peter thought that Jesus was demeaning Himself by washing the feet of the lowly. Listen to how Jesus replied: "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me" (John 13:8). There's no way that that statement is referring to Jesus washing dirt off the disciples' feet. Truly, men either receive the service that He wills to provide or we abandon Him altogether. The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many (Matthew 20:28). Will you allow the Greatest to serve you? Will you joyfully and humbly receive the service which Christ wills to give?

We recline at His table. There it is (pointing to the altar) – He serves us here, with His death, with His resurrection, with His love and His grace and His life and His righteousness. You need this service. It is most certainly for you. This is the table of His cross. Our altar is His design. The Lord reserves for you the best seat. He says to all who gather at Christ the King: "I am among you as one who serves." He rejoices that you are here. He rejoices to give you the fruit of His sacrifice. He calls you His own here. He serves you and you become like Him. And He sends you out. You are the aroma of Christ to the world (2 Corinthians 2:14-17). Not the aroma of a self-praising religious hypocrite but of one who knows how the greatest serves the least. That's what His kingdom on earth is comprised of – believers who know how intimately bonded to us He is. We have the astounding encouragement of being united to the Lord of heaven and earth. We can sing Mary's Song with her joy in our heart. "He has regarded to the low estate of

His handmaiden” (Luke 1:48 – KJV). “He who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name” (Luke 1:49). Forgiveness; salvation; that’s what the Lord of Glory serves you with.

The Apostles saw the Lord crucified. The Apostles saw the resurrected Lord. The Apostles saw His service, received His service, and then rendered His service to the world. That rhythm, that glory is among us. How privileged you are to receive what He wills to give and to give to others what you have received. His service is our treasure. There is no dispute here.