

Trinity 10

I stand here in need of God's mercy and grace. May I speak in the name of the God, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

**For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves?
Is it not the one at the table?**

As any waiter, as any person working within the service industry will be able to tell you, the guest or customer is king. There are nice and kind monarchs and there are indifferent ones and then there are the rude, unkind and sometimes even abusive monarchs, but like short-term queens or kings, guests and customers have to be served with the utmost care and respect. Many a restaurant or business does heavily depend on good customer service like this, in order to survive and thrive.

Being a guest, a customer, one of these short-term monarchs, can be very enjoyable. But what about being on the other side, what about being the one who serves? Some of you may work or have worked in the past as the person serving in some kind of way. From my own experience, it can be rewarding, providing someone with a brief few moments of feeling valued and cared for. But it can also be demoralising being talked down to, treated as a lesser human being or even being shouted at. Being a servant can be rewarding, but it is leaving the person serving often vulnerable to the whims and moods of the one being served. Yet in the last moments with his disciples, before he is arrested, condemned and unjustly executed, as they are having yet another fight over who among them is the greatest, Jesus tells them:

The greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like one who serves.

This is not how power and status work in the world around us, nor in the world around Jesus' disciples. Generally, in this world, if one has power and status one can choose to be kind and caring, but if one is not in the mood for that, well tough for anyone under one's power and authority. That was how power and status worked in Jesus' time and in ours. Yet Jesus once again challenges the reality of the world we live in with the very different reality of God's kingdom.

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Rather than being born with power and status or working hard to prove one is better and stronger than anyone else in order to receive power and status, in God's kingdom power and status are the result of our willingness to humbly serve others. Jesus repeatedly gave us an example of this kind of greatness during his life on Earth. In the gospel of John, we are told that before the last supper, Jesus showed this principle to the disciples by washing their dirty and smelly feet, like only the lowliest of lowly servants would be made to do.

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Would we be willing to serve like this? Would we be willing to give up power and status to live like this? I mean, what is in it for us? Smelly feet and people talking down to us? No thank you! Why would anyone choose to live as a servant, to not insist or hold on to power and status?

Why would Jesus, the Son of God, choose such a humiliating and vulnerable way of life? I am not sure his humiliating and torturous death on a cross is a great advertisement for this way of life... So why, what good does it do?

Maybe we need to ask a different question. What good does the arrogant, power-hungry posturing of many of our current world leaders and business leaders do? Well, I guess for them, this might work well, although, watching some of them, I am not entirely convinced that this is making them happy or content. I very definitely would say the selfish, arrogant and power-hungry ways of many of our current world leaders and business leaders is causing harm, destruction and war around the world at the moment. So, looking at that, maybe it is worth considering a different way, a way that is harder and costlier, but might also bring about a world with greater justice and peace. Would we be willing to consider a life of service, rather than power and status? A life where we choose to give, rather than demand to be given? A life where we choose to put our desires and comfort second to the need of others?

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As we think about our week ahead, about our communities, neighbourhoods, the people who are or are not in our lives, what would it mean for us to choose to serve, rather than hold on to power and status, like Jesus teaches us? Amen.