

Diatithemai (Luke 22:24-30)

24th August 2025 – 10:00am Holy Communion

Luke 22:24-30

A dispute also arose among them as to which one of them was to be regarded as the greatest. But he said to them, 'The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you; rather the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like one who serves.

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.

'You are those who have stood by me in my trials; 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.

<Prayer>

Sophie and I had a rather nice experience on Friday – one of those I'm surprised we had not had before. After a few days away in the west-country we stopped off at Glastonbury to walk Gracie in the lovely green area there. The best walk is to up Glastonbury Tor, the remarkably steep and high hill that towers unequally over the otherwise flat land of the Somerset levels. It's a place of great history, with the impressive tower on top of the Tor, a ruin left from a former church of St Michaels. **I have no doubt that it was intended to be a way to consider the higher places of God, looking up from below.** Down in the town are also the ruins of what was once the grandest and

richest benedictine monastery in all of England. That was until Henry VIII got his hands on it in 1539.

Altogether there are 12,239 parishes in the Church of England, of which Glastonbury is one and Haslemere is another. You can travel all the way from the parish of Berwick on the Scottish border, down to the Isles of Scilly off the coast of Cornwall and you will never once leave the parishes of England. But don't imagine the Church of England as a place where everything levels out equally. If you have ever worked in a large corporation then you would find the organisation of the C-of-E rather vexing. **Some parishes are the greatest** – with money and ministry rising to the top, whereas others are struggling with ancient buildings and a loss of identity as, towns and cities grow around them. Comparisons are made between churches, but it isn't easy to then try and share it all out equally across the land.

Equality and inequality are factors that have always been with us, in all part of the population. There is a whole series of sermons I could preach on every stratum of society, each being a measure in its own way – justice, identity, economy and education. You can create a league table on any of these and then go on campaign. That may be no bad thing (to try to do something about them), **but we must be a little careful not to commodify the goods of Almighty God as being less than equal from his hand. Consider grace and salvation, his Word of Scripture and his Holy Spirit, these cannot be traded or saved up in some places more than others.** Once again, the mess of people can look up to a much higher place than the grubby competitions of men.

Luke's gospel today has a flashpoint moment where the level differences are seen between the disciples. 'A dispute also arose among them as to which one of them was to be regarded as the greatest.'

No names are given here, but you know that across the gospels some of the disciples seem to get more of a hearing than others, in what they say or do. Actually, some of the disciples are hardly noticed at all. One of those quiet types is St Bartholomew. **I name him because his feast day is today - 24th August. He is one of our patron saints for Haslemere Parish.**

Hardly anything is said or known about Bartholomew in the gospels, so he is one of those down the list. At the same time a lot more attention is drawn towards a much noisier subgroup of the twelve. The gospels are full of Peter, Andrew, James and John. It seems a shame to say that it was not an equal hearing, even in the twelve disciples surrounding Jesus. **This dispute of greatness in today's gospel, I think, was between these two groups.**

The moment of this gospel story is the Last Supper. They are all sat to eat, with I'm sure some wine and a bit of banter and repartee. They have been together following Jesus for most of three years. Familiarity, as they say, breeds contempt. **Is it not a natural force of humanity that friendships, rivalries and factions develop in groups where people are thrown together?** Jesus sees and hears this dispute - certainly not for the first time, I'm sure. None of them are exactly great in relative terms. After all, it's just a bunch of fishermen and tax collectors.

But in their own milieu, some of them fancy playing the king. I don't think we should be surprised by that, considering some of the language that Jesus has been using to teach about his new coming Kingdom. They are being developed as leaders, even leaders worthy of sitting as the Twelve Tribes of Israel. **So, Jesus reminds them of the spoiled rule of kings** and gentiles, who set themselves as patrons of favour, attracting people who needed them, brokering power. **'The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those in authority over them are called benefactors.'**

Here is a picture of inequality - giving benefits to a select few, granting favour or fortune as quid-pro-quos, never with grace but always with expectation and purchased loyalty. 'But not so with you [says Jesus]; rather the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like one who serves.'

The picture of serving works well here, as it will do later for Jesus when he washes all their feet. Remember it's the occasion of the Last Supper. We know that Jesus gave out the bread and the wine that evening, alongside all of the other elements of the Passover Meal, which had to be given and served. Now imagine Jesus on his feet or stretching, over to where they each are. He is distributing equally, no doubt with himself last. **Jesus demonstrates his point, at their point of need.** 'For who is greater, the one who is at the table [he means them] or the one who serves [he means himself]? Is it not the one at the table? But I am among you as one who serves.'

Christ meets their fleshly dispute of greatness by serving them. The one who has been confessed as the Messiah is the greater, but serves as the least. Only in this way shall they be worthy of what comes next.

'You are those who have stood by me in my trials; 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.'

What a wonderful picture of humanity this is, painted so many times for us all to remember.

I'll finish by working a little more with this phrase from Jesus: '*I confer on you*'. **The underlying Greek is the word Di-atith-ema.** This is the only time that word is used in the four gospels, so it has been picked out especially for its great meaning. The translation could also be '*I appoint you*', or perhaps more telling is: '*I dispose upon you*'. The same phrase appears once in the Books of Acts, and four times in the Book of Hebrews. **In all cases the appointment is like becoming the executor of a last will and testament.**

Is not Christ in that same place? That very evening he will be arrested, in 72 hours he will be dead. **Jesus had that final Passover supper planned for this special moment.** Where at one point they dispute their greatness, the next they are gently scolded and with grace – **trusted to be great, but in a much greater way.** Where one dies, another is found worthy in stature to carry the promise, to carry the covenant – better things are to be inherited. The Church of England carries on in the mess of life and all its inequalities, because we have a more equal place in God's Kingdom – one lovely big parish.

So how would you like to be given a score - each of us personally? Where would you like to see yourself on the scale of all people, like the 12,000 parishes? It is of course a false reading. **It is better to be appointable by Christ, as a people of the greater goods of God – His grace and salvation, His Word of Scripture and His Holy Spirit.**

Look upwards for equality, because I fear on the human levels below, we shall not have it any other way.

Amen