ASH WEDNESDAY
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Rolling Meadows, Illinois

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IN NOMINE JESU

St. Luke 22: 24 - 27: A DISPUTE ALSO AROSE AMONG THEM, WHICH OF THEM WAS TO BE REGARDED AS THE GREATEST. AND HE SAID TO THEM, "THE KINGS OF THE GENTILES EXERCISE LORDSHIP OVER THEM; AND THOSE IN AUTHORIT OVER THEM ARE CALLED BENEFACTORS. BUT NOT SO WITH YOU; RATHER LET THE GREATE AMONG YOU BECOME AS THE YOUNGEST, AND THE LEADER AS ONE WHO SERVES. FOR WHICH IS THE GREATER, ONE WHO SITS AT TABLE, OR ONE WHO SERVES? IS IT NOT THE ONE WHO SITS AT TABLE? BUT I AM AMONG YOU AS ONE WHO SERVES.

St. John 13: 3 ff: JESUS.....ROSE FROM SUPPER, LAID ASIDE HIS GARMENT AND GIRDED HIMSELF WITH A TOWEL. THEN HE POURED WATE INTO A BASIN, AND BEGAN TO WASH THE DISCIPLES' FEET, AND TO WIPE THEM WITH THE TOWEL WITH WHICH HE WAS GIRDED. HE CAME TO SIMON PETER; AND PETER SAID TO HI "LORD, DO YOU WASH MY FEET?" .....PETER SAID TO HIM, "YOU SHALL NEVE WASH MY FEET." JESUS ANSWERED HIM, "IF I DO NOT WASH YOU, YOU HAVE NO PART IN ME."

This is the TIME of YEAR when many of us like to DREAM of VACATIONS. Perhaps you are DREAMING of BASKING under the WARM SUN in FLORIDA or JAMAICA or HAWAII. If you are a SKI BUFF, maybe you are DREAMING of going to DENVER or to UPPER MICHIGAN or someplace else. Maybe you wish it were SUMMER, when you could WALK in the WOODS, and LOOK at the BLUE SKY and the BIRDS and say, "ISN'T THIS GREAT - THIS IS THE LIFE." There are 2 things that PEOPLE usually associate with REAL LIVING - - - CAREFREENESS and LUXURY.

But a FAR CRY this is from the MEANING of LIFE that our LORD GAVE US! He had a great deal to SAY about what it REALLY MEANS to LIVE. St. John says of Him, "IN HIM WAS LIFE." He lived LIFE to the FULL - He lived the BEST POSSIBLE LIFE - HE REALLY LIVED.

Our Lord's MISSION in the WORLD was to SHARE His FULL LIFE with MEN. "I AM COME," He said, "THAT THEY MAY HAVE LIFE, AND HAVE IT ABUNDANTLY." This is the way that we must LOOK at His SUFFERING and DEATH - - - that we might have LIFE!

The picture is not of a EASY CHAIR but of a CROSS - - - not of WALKING HAND in HAND on a SUNNY BEACH or in a SHADED WOODS but of HANDS pierced with NAILS - - - not of CAREFREENESS but the WHOLE BURDEN of the WHOLE WORLD on HIS shoulders. He DIED that we might LIVE. "HE DIED FOR ALL, THAT THOSE WHO LIVE MIGHT LIVE NO LONGER FOR THEMSELVES BUT FOR HIM WHO FOR THEIR SAKE DIED AND WAS RAISED."

In these LENTEN SERVICES we want to CONSENTRATE on the ABUNDANT LIFE. We want to SEE LIFE in all of its FULLNESS, as Jesus GIVES it to us and HELPS us LIVE IT.

First of all, the ABUNDANT LIFE is a life of SERVICE. And certainly that is PRETTY HARD for us to SWALLOW. SERVICE? - we don't real ly think in THOSE TERMS at all. At least I don't. I like to be called, "HERR PASTOR." I like to be in a position of authority. I like to be able to THROW my WEIGHT AROUND sometimes. And I dare say that I am NOT much different from any of YOU. You LIKE to throw YOUR WEIGHT AROUND TOO.

The very NIGHT in which our LORD was BETRAYED, His Disciples fell to BICKERING among themselves about WHO should be counted the GREATEST in the KINGDOM of GOD. While they ARGUED, Christ confronted them squarely with this QUESTION: "WHO IS THE GREATER, ONE WHO ~~SERVES~~ SITS AT TABLE, OR ONE WHO SERVES?.....I AM AMONG YOU AS ONE WHO SERVES."

The nameless waiter may NOT look IMPORTANT compared to the SUCCESSFUL MAN who sits down to DINNER at a FASHIONABLE ~~EATING PLACE~~ RESTAURANT. Our Lord said He was WILLING to take the PLACE of the WAITER. He PREFERED to demonstrate His GREATNESS by SERVING. Everything He said - everything He DID - right down to the CROSS - grew out of a consuming DESIRE to SERVE. "THE SON OF MAN CAME NOT TO BE SERVED BUT TO SERVE, AND TO GIVE HIS LIFE FOR US."

This is the MESSAGE - - the ABUNDANT LIFE is FOUND in SERVING. It is NOT what you GET out of PEOPLE but what PEOPLE GET out of YOU. It is NOT USING PEOPLE, but being USEFUL to PEOPLE. It is NOT DEMANDING HONOR, but BESTOWING HONOR. It is NOT "ME FIRST" and others SECOND - - - it is "GOD FIRST," "OTHERS SECOND", "ME LAST."

"I AM AMONG YOU," says Jesus, "AS ONE WHO SERVES." He DEVOTED ALL HIS LIFE to the SERVICE of OTHERS - - HEALING the SICK, CARING for CHILDREN, CORRECTING the WRONG-DOER, TEACHING the IGNORANT, COMFORTING the SORROWING. He "EMPTIED HIMSELF BY TAKING THE FORM OF A SERVANT.....HE HUMBLED HIMSELF AND BECAME OBEDIANT UNTO DEATH, EVEN DEATH ON A CROSS."

We are SAVED to SERVE. Martin Luther said it well: "He has REDEEMED ME.....that I may be HIS OWN and LIVE UNDER HIM in His KINGDOM and SERVE HIM in EVERLASTING RIGHTEOUSNESS, INNOCENCE, and [redacted] BLESSEDNESS." And SERVING HIM means SERVING our FELLOW MEN. Jesus said that what we DO for the LEAST of [redacted] HIS BRETHREN we DO FOR HIM.

The FILM STRIP which we just SAW made a BIG POINT of the "HOWEVER, HOWEVER, HOWEV that we so frequently use as an EXCUSE - for coping out of SERVING and HELPING and CARING about OTHER PEOPLE - for Being ONE. But, you see, Jesus just does NOT let us GET AWAY with that.

Shortly after His discussion with the disciples about GREATNESS, our Lord gave them an UNFORGETABLE LESSON on the subject of SERVING. They had walked into the UPPER ROOM at JERUSALEM to EAT the PASSOVER MEAL with HIM for the LAST TIME. There were JARS of WATER at the DOOR for them to WASH their FEET - as was their CUSTOM upon entering a HOUSE. But they ALL walked right on by. Was it because the 1st one to stoop would FEEL

OBLIGED to WASH the FEET of the OTHERS? I somehow imagine John thinking to himself, "I'm NOT going to WASH PETER'S FEET!" or Peter thinking to himself, "I'm NOT going to WASH JUDAS'S FEET!" It certainly might have been that way. At any rate, when our Lord girded Himself with a towel and WASHED THEIR FEET, they KNEW that they had MISSED an IMPORTANT OPPORTUNITY for SERVICE and REAL GREATNESS.

When Peter OBJECTED to letting Jesus WASH his feet, our Lord said to him, "IF I DO NOT WASH YOU, YOU HAVE NO PART IN ME," The whole point is that we NEED to LET HIM SERVE US. We have DIRTY FEET that NEED to be WASHED before we can ENTER GOD'S BANQUET HALL. And that is what ASH WEDNESDAY is ALL ABOUT. Jesus MUST WASH US. We are SINNERS who NEED CLEANSING. It is the BLOOD He shed on the CROSS that CLEANSES US of our SINS. To become SERVANTS of GOD, we must ACCEPT in FAITH the SERVICE that He performs FOR US. To LIVE - we must let Him DIE FOR US.

When by God's GRACE THAT HAPPENS, we are then READY to SERVE HIM. And we are surrounded by ALL KINDS of OPPORTUNITIES for such SERVICE - - - to BEFRIEND the LONELY - to VISIT the SICK and the SHUT-INS - to WIPE AWAY a TEAR from a CHILD'S FACE - - to GRASP the trembling hand of an OLD MAN - - to LISTEN patiently to a YOUNG PERSON who wants to CONFIDE in us - - to BEAR with the SINS of OTHERS as we would want them to bear with OURS - - being SENSITIVE to the HURTS that PEOPLE around us FEEL. THE ABUNDANT LIFE is really a LIFE of SERVICE that says, "I CARE - I CARE ABOUT YOU." Amen.

and IMMORTALITY.

Standing under the CROSS - somehow there is ONLY 1 thing now to say: GOD GIVE US SUCH A FAITH to BELIEVE EVEN WHEN WE DO NOT UNDERSTAND. Amen.