

1 Sermon, December 18, 2011

Texts: Matthew 7:21-23, Matthew 8:5-13, Ephesians 4:1-6,
Title: "Waiting for Jesus: the Lord"

(sing) Love, the Lord, is on the way!

What does that word "Lord" mean?

Well, Matthew 7 tells us that "Lord" is more than a name. "Lord" is a relationship, an unequal relationship, where the Lord has control over the serf, or over the disciple.

When I was in Junior High School, I had a friend named Gary Davis, who was a very smart boy. He read up on all sorts of things, especially science.

One day we got into an argument about the word "Lord." Gary insisted that the origin of the word "Lord" was medieval; that it was primarily a word that referred to the "Lord of the Manor," or "Lord of the Castle."

I didn't like that idea: I said that the word "Lord" is about God first and foremost.

It turns out that we were both right. "Lord" is a word for a ruler who is in charge of a territory. In Jewish and Christian tradition, however, dating far back before the middle ages, "Lord" referred to God.

In Greek it is *Kurios*, and it appears 625 times in the New Testament.

The New Testament insists that Jesus is Lord. And that means that Jesus is the one we owe allegiance to. Jesus is the one who is in charge.

And interestingly enough, the phrase "Jesus is Lord" had political overtones back then.

Roman Emperor Domitian wanted to be called "Lord" – *kurios* and even "Lord our God."

So when Christians said "Jesus is Lord," they meant that the Roman Emperor was *not*. They meant that the government was not supreme. And this is what kept getting the Christians into trouble with the authorities.

So just saying "Jesus is Lord" was a risky business in the Roman world.

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But in Matthew 7, even saying "Jesus is Lord" was not enough. Jesus said it was *most* important to do the will of his Father in heaven. That does not consist of flashy things or safely spiritual things, but according to Matthew 25 it consists of feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, being vulnerable and compassionate in the midst of an uncaring world.

In other words, Christians are not only to say that Jesus is Lord, we are to act like we owe the Lord our allegiance, our devotion, our life itself. As Christ followers, we are to submit to the will of one who is greater than us, and who has set love as the standard.

That's why the story of the centurion is so significant.

A centurion was a Roman commander in charge of 100 soldiers, although at times this was raised to 200 or more. A centurion was somebody who had a great deal of authority in the Roman system, who may even have been appointed by the Senate.

In today's gospel reading, the centurion came to Jesus. This is someone who was used to having people do things for him, but he himself came to Jesus to beg Jesus for the healing of his servant. The centurion calls Jesus "Lord," which means that this commander was ranking himself under Jesus, a traveling preacher and healer.

This was remarkable. For the centurion to call Jesus "Lord," was an astounding thing. You can imagine him kneeling before Jesus with his head bowed, asking Jesus for this favor.

And the centurion humbles himself further, saying he is not worthy to have Jesus under his roof. But he knows that if Jesus commands it, his servant will be healed.

The centurion places himself under Jesus' command, saying that if Jesus commands him, it will be so too for his servant.

The centurion does not give up his command. Instead, he elevates Jesus to a place higher than himself. And he says that Jesus is in charge of it all.

That is what it means for Jesus to be "Lord."

In Houston, Texas, there's a very practical illustration of what it means to have Jesus as Lord. It happens every Saturday in an entryway of St. John's United Methodist Church. The cast of characters changes, but here is one example:

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70-year-old Dolores Scott carefully rolled up the cuffs of Willie Wright's khaki pants and helped the 50-year-old man remove his socks and shoes.

Wright sighed as she helped him place his feet in a large bowl of warm, sudsy water. With a washcloth, Scott gently scrubbed his feet, paying careful attention to his toes.

He closed his eyes, relaxed and leaned back into the chair. Once Wright's feet were clean, Dolores Scott powdered, lotioned and slipped them into a new pair of white socks.

Willie Wright smiled, and so did Dolores Scott.

And then Wright put on his new knit cap, picked up his bag and headed back out onto the street. Wright is homeless. This simple act of personal kindness meant a great deal to him.

Dolores Scott was acting out the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

The church and volunteers who are not a part of the church give out fresh socks and hygiene kits to the homeless people (mostly men) who come.

It may seem like a small thing, but washing the feet of homeless people is a powerful witness to who is in charge.

It is not the mental illness that may be part of why some are homeless;

It is not the economy and relative poverty of some as opposed to others;

It is not a faceless big city

It is not the human tendency of people to avoid those who are down on their luck.

Instead, it is Jesus Christ who is Lord. It is the Love of God that is the final answer.

Today's reading from Ephesians gives us further testimony as to what it means to have Jesus as Lord.

Ephesians reads:

"I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

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The Lordship of Jesus means that I am to humble myself before one who is greater than me. I am to be gentle, for I do not want to hurt anyone or anything the Lord has made. I want to be patient, because I am not in control of the schedule. I mean to seek peace with my neighbor, because only in that way can the will of God be done.

It is God's will that is important, not mine.

The Ephesians reading goes on:

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all."
Ephesians 4:1-6, NRSV.

There is only one God. There is only one Lord. Jesus is Lord.

Money is not Lord.
Pride in self is not Lord.
Pleasure is not Lord.
Power is not Lord.

Jesus is Lord.

That's easier to say than to act out. Fortunately, we have the Holy Spirit to guide us; our Christian community to support us; and the wisdom of the Bible to inform us.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

~~We can say that Jesus is Lord of Heaven and the next life.~~

~~It's harder to admit that Jesus is Lord of Earth and this life.~~

~~It's easier to say that Jesus came to save us from hell than to say that Jesus came to save us from gossip, prejudice, violence, isolation, carelessness about the poor, hurry, hatred, envy, or anger.~~

~~——— If Jesus is Lord, he has come to save us from our sins in *this* life, and not just in the next.~~

~~I wonder if Christmas appeals to us in part because at Christmas Jesus is an innocent baby, and we'd like to be innocent like a baby.~~

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~~— Unfortunately, the Lordship of Jesus Christ means that we have to face the adult world, and face temptation and evil and injustice.~~

~~— Jesus' Lordship is costly, and goes through the cross before getting to Easter Sunday.~~

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many deeds of power in your name?’ Then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; go away from me, you evildoers.’” Matthew 7:21-23, NRSV.

“When he entered Capernaum, a centurion came to him, appealing to him and saying, “Lord, my servant is lying at home paralyzed, in terrible distress.” And he said to him, “I will come and cure him.” The centurion answered, “Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; but only speak the word, and my servant will be healed. For I also am a man under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to one, ‘Go,’ and he goes, and to another, ‘Come,’ and he comes, and to my slave, ‘Do this,’ and the slave does it.” When Jesus heard him, he was amazed and said to those who followed him, “Truly I tell you, in no one in Israel have I found such faith. I tell you, many will come from east and west and will eat with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the heirs of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” And to the centurion Jesus said, “Go; let it be done for you according to your faith.” And the servant was healed in that hour.” Matthew 8:5-13, NRSV.

“I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.” Ephesians 4:1-6, NRSV.