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The Search for the Holy Grail

Luke 17: 20-21

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In the last 30 years, the Holy Grail, the mythical and perhaps still in existence cup from which Jesus and his disciples drank at the Last Supper, has inspired some great and not great works of literature and film. In the early 1970s, the British comedic troop, Monte Python, produced what, for me, was one of the funniest movies ever: Monte Python and the Holy Grail. It is, like all of Python's works, a mockery of just about everything, and for many, it has become a classic. I know there are young people in this congregation who have memorized just about every line of this spoof of the centuries long quest to find the Holy Grail. A decade later, in Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade, which is the final film of this amazing archeologist, Indiana Jones discovers the Grail whose power saves his father's life but then, it slips from his hands and he loses it as the walls of an ancient ruin crash around them. And, of course, we have Dan Brown's controversial best-seller, The Da Vinci Code, whose claim is that the Grail isn't a cup at all, but a person, Mary Magdalene.

These fictional stories of searches for the Holy Grail obscure the historical quests, the most famous of which took place during the Crusades of the 12th through 14th centuries. Legend had it that this cup of the Last Supper had been taken by Joseph of Arimathea who had collected the precious blood of Jesus in it and that years later, he brought it to Britain, to a monastery in the town of Glastonbury. But just prior to the Crusades, the Cup, so says the legend, disappeared. Some said it had been taken up to heaven and was sometimes revealed by way of a vision, that it could be seen by the pure in heart through prayer and fasting. Others believed it was a real treasure – gold and silver – just waiting to be found.

During this time, the legends of King Arthur grew popular, tales of the Round Table knights seeking the Gail, and sometimes, like Sir Galahad, they caught a vision of it (like in Monte Python's version). And what they saw was a cup of gold and silver and precious gems, and it had miraculous healing powers, even, so it was said, to save a person from death.

The search continues today with groups like The Keepers of the Grail, and the descendents of mysterious abbots who escaped with the chalice when their monastery in Glastonbury was destroyed. That cup, is known as the Nanteos Cup. There is a Grail in a museum in Dublin, and some Christians in Constantinople believe it is part of the vast

collection of the Orthodox Holy See. If you look on the internet, there are hundreds of pages of possibilities.

The search for the Holy Grail seems endless and yet, if you want to really search, you might as well start at the beginning, to the earliest written words referring to the Lord's Supper. Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, written within two decades after the death and resurrection of Jesus, rings with words so familiar to us:

For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night he was betrayed took a loaf of bread and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body broken for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way, he took the cup also, after supper saying, "this cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this as often as you drink it in remembrance of me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes."

I Corinthians 11: 23-26

Perhaps Jesus' earliest followers understood the meaning of the Lord's Supper so completely because he shared so many meals with his friends and strangers, and these meals show how bountiful and giving God is. The Lord's Supper is one sign of God's gracious presence in our midst, God's kingdom come.

I probably should have preached this sermon last week on Communion Sunday. If I had, we would have had the visual symbol of the Table of the Lord before us, stacked with the gifts of bread and drink, showing us the creating, healing presence of Christ in our midst. But I decided not to, and talk about this today because I didn't want the power of something I just said to get lost on us: "God's kingdom is come." Now, that might not seem like much but listen again: "God's kingdom is come." It is precisely what Jesus announced with one word, a simple preposition in today's Gospel reading from Luke. In the Greek, the original language of the New Testament, the word Jesus uses is entos, which can mean either within or among: "The Kingdom of God is entos," said Jesus.

Once Jesus was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God was coming, and he answered, "The kingdom of God is not coming with things that can be observed; nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'There it is!' For, in fact, the kingdom of God is among you.

Luke 17: 20-21

For centuries Christians all over the world have searched for the Holy Grail. We have searched the highest mountain peaks and sailed the deepest and most dangerous seas trying to find it. We have done wonderful and horrible things in pursuit of it. But do you know something? God's kingdom is come; it's among you, right here, today.

Some search for this Holy Grail all their lives in other people or through their passions. Some seek it out in certain kinds of churches or places of peace and refuge. Other's take their quest into their work or family or play. And each time, they think: "I'm almost there; it's just around the corner. It'll be there when I accomplish this goal or that,

when the kids get older and settled or when peace on Earth finally comes. "I can see it; it's almost within my reach!"

Do you know something? The Holy Grail is right here; the kingdom of God is among you; it's within you.

It really is. If you come to church early some Sunday morning, you can see the kingdom of God when you look into the kitchen and folks are setting coffee and goodies for Fellowship Time, or if you sit in the sanctuary and watch the choir wipe the sleep from their eyes and listen as they struggle with an anthem and groan and laugh to get it right for our worship of God. Or you can smell it when something wonderful is baking in the kitchen, an olfactory sensation you haven't experienced in so long. You can feel it when you sit with friends and share a meal and tell stories and share memories and laugh or cry so hard your sides ache. You can see it when white folk and black folk and brown and yellow and red folk talk together and listen together and begin to work together for justice. You can feel it when you step outside and the frigid air blows on your face and the wisps of white clouds hurry on past and your heart is called to commit itself along with others to work to preserve God's planet. You can know it when a child is dedicated in worship.

We're quick to search for the Holy Grail, in the great or spectacular or what we call the miraculous. And that's OK, unless you only look "out there" saying, "there it is!" or "here it is!" The kingdom of God, said Jesus, is here, now. There are signs all over this sanctuary that point us to it – the empty cross and the open Bible, the Communion Table and the pulpit where the Living Word is to be proclaimed, in the ones sitting next to you and in front and behind. Take a look around you, and look out the windows, for what's out there belongs in here and we belong out there and we all belong together, for the kingdom is come.

The Holy Grail? It's right here.

When you leave here and sit down for lunch today, take a look at your own table. The Holy Grail will be on it; all meals are holy because God's presence makes them holy. In fact, all life is holy because it is shot through with the Presence of Christ and the power of the Holy One.

If another quest for the Holy Grail is needed today, let it be one that will open our eyes to the loving presence of the One whose kingdom is come.