**Kingdom Culture** August 28, 2002

In New Life Christian, it has been our joy to sponsor a number of refugee families and welcome them into Canada. The Kapopo family, Aziza and family, the Ayuba family, Bandeke and her daughters and Longin have brought great enthusiasm and lots of life to our GCI congregation. What a blessing!

Not only have all of them learned a lot about Canadian culture and living in this country, we have learned about their culture and traditions. Within days of their arrival our immigrants connected with other tribe members living here. Mupe would say, “my sister in Surrey will help me.” Job would say, “my brother is coming to visit.” This would confuse me since I wasn’t aware that they had any relatives here. I quickly learned that every tribe member is a brother or sister, a mother or father. How beautiful. In these tribes, these cultures, there is a lot of support, but there are also strong traditions and expectations about how things should be done, how people should treat each other as husbands and wives, as children, as parents, even relatives who are still in Africa.

All of us have a heritage, a culture into which we are born. But today, I want to remind you that your FIRST culture, your FIRST responsibility is to the kingdom of God.

Our first culture, our TRUE culture is KINGDOM culture. We are citizens of the Kingdom of God. Jesus is our King. He teaches us kingdom culture through his words and example. He sets the expectations and traditions that we must live by even today. He has taught us how to live by kingdom culture—how to treat each other, what is really important in life.

Our passage for today is found in Luke 14.

*On one occasion when Jesus was going to the house of a leader of the Pharisees to eat a meal on the Sabbath, they were watching him closely. (**Luke 14:1 NRSV**)*

So here is Jesus, invited to an important dinner with the religious leaders of his day. Notice that it was on the Sabbath, and the Jewish culture had very strict laws about what people were allowed to do on the Sabbath. The leaders were watching Jesus closely. Ah ha. They’re trying to trap Jesus again, catch him doing something wrong so they can use it against him.

*Just then, in front of him, there was a man who had dropsy. And Jesus asked the lawyers and Pharisees, “Is it lawful to cure people on the Sabbath, or not?” But they were silent. So Jesus took him and healed him, and sent him away. Then he said to them, “If one of you has a child or an ox that has fallen into a well, will you not immediately pull it out on a Sabbath day?” And they could not reply to this. (**Luke 14:2-6 NRSV**)*

How interesting that the man who had dropsy just appeared in front of Jesus seemingly out of nowhere. In Jewish culture, a man who was sick like this would be considered unclean and certainly wouldn’t be allowed at a fancy dinner for the leaders. It looks like a set up! The Pharisees were trying to trap Jesus because they wanted Jesus to heal the man, which they considered to be wrong, as working on the Sabbath.

As usual, Jesus had compassion and healed the man. He was living by Kingdom culture, not the culture of the religious leaders. He was not afraid of them and their plots. He lived by God’s expectations, not theirs. He pointed out how their culture, their traditions allowed someone to rescue a child or animal on the Sabbath yet rescue from illness was not permitted. This was not Kingdom culture!

Let’s read on in verse 7:

*When he noticed how the guests chose the places of honor, he told them a parable. (**Luke 14:7 NRSV**)*

Before we look at the parable did you notice a change in the story? Who is doing the watching now? That’s right, Jesus now becomes the one who is doing the watching as “he noticed how the guests chose the places of honor.” He is watching the guests instead of being watched by the host. Now that Jesus has silenced his opponents, he presents a parable Jesus has for the guests.

*“When you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet, do not sit down at the place of honor, in case someone more distinguished than you has been invited by your host; and the host who invited both of you may come and say to you, ‘Give this person your place,’ and then in disgrace you would start to take the lowest place. But when you are invited, go and sit down at the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he may say to you, ‘Friend, move up higher’; then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at the table with you. For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.” (**Luke 14:8-11 NRSV**)*

Why is Jesus telling this parable? Is he just giving them advice about how not to look stupid at a banquet? Is he telling them the secret way to get to the top? No, he’s talking to the person who wants to be important, feel important because others think he’s important. **It’s the person who cares more about what their culture and what people think about them than what God thinks about them.**

We are reminded about the great wedding feast mentioned in Revelation 19:7. We are invited to be guests when Jesus marries his bride, the church. God the Father is the host. It’s what HE thinks that matters! He looks at our hearts, our attitudes. Do we look like Jesus, the loving servant and savior of all mankind who humbled himself on the cross and took on every sin of the world?

We don’t need to compete for the best seat at the VIP table. Jesus has invited us to enjoy the meal, and he has a seat for us at his table. More importantly, we are invited to enjoy him and his relationship with the Father by the Spirit. We have been seated at the right hand of the Father in Jesus Christ. Our standing with the host has been settled through his own humbling and exalting through his death and resurrection.

After Jesus addresses everyone in the room with his parable, he then gets more personal by adding a word to “the one who had invited him.” If you are still listening to the words of this scripture, you are the one who has invited Jesus. May we listen to his final words personally spoken to us today:

*He said also to the one who had invited him, “When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, in case they may invite you in return, and you would be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.” (**Luke 14:12-14 NRSV**)*

Jesus reminds us that we should be reaching out and inviting not-yet believers into our lives. Yes, it will cost you something. You will have to sacrifice. And that’s OK. That’s what Jesus did. That’s kingdom culture.

Here are 2 things I want you to remember about Kingdom Culture:

1. Jesus is the King of God’s kingdom, and we are citizens of THIS kingdom FIRST.
2. Citizens of God’s Kingdom should serve in love and humility.

When Jesus lived on earth, he modelled perfect, loving, servant leadership. This is kingdom culture. The leaders serve in love and humility. Let’s not forget how Jesus took on the dirty job of the lowest servant as he knelt and washed the dusty feet of the disciples. Let’s not forget how he laid down his life as a loving sacrifice to save the world.

How should WE live and show this Kingdom culture?

We should humble ourselves as Jesus did in loving service to others. We should “wash the feet” of others. That might mean a husband takes the children to the park so his wife can have a break and he can spend time with his children. Loving servanthood might mean sacrificing our own plans so that we can help a senior go shopping or take them to an appointment. Loving servanthood might mean making food for a friend who is sick or helping clean up their home. Loving servanthood might mean giving a homeless person the gift of conversation, making them feel like a human being rather than an outcast. This is kingdom culture. This is what Jesus would do.

Kingdom culture means loving and serving others without expecting anything back. It means loving people who are hard to love. It means forgiving even when the other person isn’t sorry. It means remembering that every human being is a child of God and precious in his sight—including the poor, the crippled, the drug addicts, the sexually confused, criminals and the homeless.

So even as we participate in the cultures of our heritage—whether that is African culture, European culture, Filipino culture or Canadian culture—let’s remember that Kingdom Culture is first! We always need to look at the traditions of our own culture and ask, “Are these what Jesus would do?”

Jesus came to the people of his day to give a new culture. New expectations. New ways of looking at who is important. New ways of looking at men and women. New ways of looking at relationships and family. This is KINGDOM CULTURE, and as citizens of God’s kingdom, THIS is the culture that we must live by FIRST. Let’s love and serve humbly like Jesus our king.