Archbishop of York sermon York, WA

20 October 2026

St Luke's Gospel, chapter 22 and verse 27. Jesus says to his disciples, which means, of course, he also says to us, his disciples today, "I am among you as one who serves."

Sisters and brothers, first of all, I bring you greetings. Well, how should we call it? You're York in Western Australia. We've all heard of the Big Apple, New York in the United States of America. Therefore, I suppose today I'm going to have to refer to where I come from as Old York. So I am the Archbishop of Old York, and Old York in the north of England, which I think York, Australian new York, is named after, is a very ancient place. The Roman Emperor Constantine was declared emperor in York in the fourth century. And there was a Roman settlement there.

The Church of York Minster, where I serve, is a beautiful church established in the year 627 and we have our 1400th anniversary next year. The reason they built a little wooden church, which is now the mighty York Minster, is that Pope Gregory the Great had established a mission to England, and an Italian missionary called Paulinus was consecrated as the first Bishop of York. He was sent north to evangelise the people of the north, and he converted the king to the Christian faith.

And in those days, baptisms would happen in rivers or lakes or in the sea, but when you baptise an important person like a king, Paulinus decided that we better adopt the Roman customs of baptisms in a font. So he built a little wooden church in York in the year 627 for the baptism of King Edwin, and then over the centuries, York Minster was established. I am the 98th Archbishop of York, going back to the seventh century.

But, first and foremost, I come to you as your friend and your brother in Christ, and as a fellow disciple and follower of Jesus. Yesterday, I visited several schools in your lovely diocese, and one of the questions the children asked had something to do with all the swanky titles that I have. Would you like to hear the swanky titles? I have a lot.

My full title is the Most Reverend and Right Honourable the Lord Archbishop of York, Primate of England, and Metropolitan. That's quite a title. But the most important thing about me is not that I am the Archbishop of York. The most important thing about me is that I am a follower of Jesus, and that like King Edwin, like I suppose most of us here, I was baptised into the Christian faith. It's a real joy to come and visit this town of York and bring you greetings from your brothers and sisters in the ancient city of York, in the north of England. And I come in

friendship and fellowship simply to remind you of what you already know: that God has a great love for you in Jesus Christ; that God cares for this community. That God has a purpose for you.

In Luke's Gospel, the passage we've just read from Luke chapter 12, there is another very similar version of this story in Luke chapter 17, and the versions are so similar, and I guess many of us have heard them so often we don't notice the differences between them, and therefore perhaps, don't always pay complete attention to what is being said.

Let me start with the version that I think you probably do know very well, and you think you may have just heard. It's about a master returning from being away. This is Luke chapter 17 verse seven. When the master comes in from the field, he will say to the servants, "Come along now and prepare my supper. Get yourself ready and wait on me while I eat and drink. And after that, you may eat and drink yourself."

If your job is as a waiter or a waitress, or maybe you know people who work in a café or restaurant, and perhaps you're going to go there for a bit of lunch later - if you went in there and ordered your dinner, and the waiter said to you, "Well, hang on a minute, I've got to eat my dinner first", you would say, "Well, no, that isn't how it works. You know, in this setting, I'm the master, you're the servant. I've come here for my lunch, and your job is to serve the lunch." And you'll be very grateful that they serve the lunch. But Jesus then goes on saying, "Why do you thank the servant? Because he simply did what he was told to do. So you also, when you've done everything you were told to do, you should just say, "We are unworthy servants. All we've done is our duty.""

So that's the story we know. That's the way things are. Now, were you listening to the passage we just heard read? Because it is deeply shocking, and it turns everything upside down. Just in case you weren't listening carefully, I'm going to read it again. It starts by Jesus saying to the disciples, to those who are called to be servants, be dressed, ready for service, keep your lamps burning like servants waiting for their master to return. It's the same story. They're waiting for a master to return, so that when he comes and knocks, they can immediately open the door for him. Yes, same story. It's about a master returning. The master wants his dinner. It's the servant's job to serve the dinner. It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching and waiting when he comes. What's going to happen next in the story? The servants are ready. The master has returned. What's going to happen next? The master is going to want his dinner, and the servant's job is to provide the dinner.

But listen to what Jesus actually says, "Truly, I tell you, the Master, will dress himself to serve. He will make them, the servants, recline at the table, and he will come and wait on them." It's all the wrong way round, and that is the way of Jesus Christ. It is actually what respectable, and I'm afraid, often religious people find so very shocking about Jesus. He doesn't do the sensible,

respectable thing. He's always turning things upside down. In this story, the master comes home, and it's not the servants serving the master. It's all reversed. The master serves the servants. This is the Jesus who washes his disciples' feet. This is the Jesus who eats with all the wrong kind of people, the tax collectors, the prostitutes. I mean, no wonder the religious people of his day had to get rid of him. I mean, what further evidence do you need? I mean, he was eating with the tax collectors and the prostitutes, he didn't deny it. I mean, the man is troubled. He doesn't observe our religious protocols. He sits and eats with sinners. He washes his disciples' feet. He tells them that if someone hits you on the right cheek, offer them the left. If they take your coat offer them your cloak as well.

And it's hard. It's hard to be a follower of this Jesus, we are called to do the same. We are called to be the presence of Jesus in the ancient city of York in the north of England, and you are called to be the presence of Jesus in this town of York in beautiful Western Australia. You are called to be His presence, and the way that we enjoy that presence is by saying, as Jesus said, "I am among you as one who serves." Our relationship with this community is to be a relationship of service, and it is by this service that people will know that we are followers of Jesus.

Two other things: God does not have a plan B. God only has a plan A, and God's plan A is that in every town and every village and every community across the whole of the world, God raises up a little group of women and men to be His presence and to embody His servant heart for the sake of that community. And I've been told that this is God's plan A for this town of York. And amazingly, what's happened this morning is that God has assembled that crew of women and men in the church here, so that I can come from the old city of York to the new town of York just to remind you, to remind you that in Jesus God serves you. It is your feet He wishes to wash. It is your sins He wants to forgive. It is your heart He wants to warm and hold. It is for love of you. And then he invites you to be his presence for others.

And finally, and secondly, a story. I think the church needs to get better at telling stories. It's something I think we can learn from Indigenous peoples who are very, in my experience, very, very good storytellers. So, so let me finish with the story, and it's a story I think about our vocation to be the ones who give generously of the beautiful, good things that we've received in Jesus.

So there was once a young man who dreamed of getting great wealth and riches, and he longed for wealth and riches. One night he had a dream that if on the following day, just as the sun was setting, he went to a certain bend of the river in the forest, he would meet a holy man, and this holy man would give him a precious stone that would give him the untold wealth and riches that he craved. So, in obedience to the dream, the following day, just as the sun was setting, he went to that certain bench of the river in the forest, and sure enough, he

encountered the holy man. He knelt before the holy man, and he said to the holy man, "The stone, the stone, please give me the stone.” The holy man rose in his pocket, pulled out a great huge diamond, so large it filled the palm of his hand. And the holy man said to the young man, "Why, you must mean this. I found it on the forest path earlier today. Why, of course you can have it.” The holy man gave the young man the diamond. The young man clutched the diamond. His heart is full of joy. He runs home. His dreams have been answered. He has wealth and riches that he has longed for, but that night he cannot sleep, and he tosses and turns on his bed, deeply troubled in his spirit, and at dawn, just as the sun is rising, he returns to that certain bend of the river. He finds the holy man. He kneels before him for a second time, and returning the stone, he says to the holy man, "Please, please, give me the wealth that enables you to give away this stone for nothing.”

Amen.