

Goal: That the hearers would seek greatness in God's kingdom through service.

This morning, Jesus teaches His disciples something extremely important. Actually, it's the most important thing they'll ever learn. What is He teaching them? He's teaching them about His cross. *"The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him. And when he is killed, after three days he will rise." (But they did not understand the saying, and were afraid to ask him.)" (Mark 9: 31 – 32)*

Jesus is **NOT** saying that His cross is just part of the Christian faith and life or even that it's the most important part, but that the cross **IS** what the Christian faith and life is all about. Without the death and resurrection of Jesus, Christianity is nothing.

What's the one thing that all Christian churches have in common, no matter the denomination? It's the cross. The cross is where Jesus was crucified for us, sacrificing Himself in order that we would be reconciled back to God. All Christian teaching finds its beginning, its end, and everything in between in the cross of Jesus. And if there's any teaching that doesn't, it isn't Christian. It's in the cross that we see the power and the greatness of God in Him serving sinners, in Him serving you and me.

But that's not how we're used to thinking about greatness. Have you heard the phrase GOAT, Greatest Of All Time? It's a title given to LeBron James the basketball player. Or if you have seen the Nike commercial with Colin Kaepernick, then you've heard that you should dream to be the greatest ever, because that isn't crazy! Just do it! That's how our world defines greatness, but God defines greatness very different. Jesus asked, *"What were you discussing on the way?" But they kept silent, for on the way they had argued with one another about who was the greatest. And he sat down and called the twelve. And he said to them, "If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all." (Mark 9: 33 – 35)*

It might seem like just silly, harmless argument. *"Just a little competition,"* we might say, *"and competition is good so that we improve."* But in claiming to be great, each of the disciples were clearly saying that the others weren't as great. This is the very mind of sin. This struggle for power and greatness exists in the world but it doesn't have any place in the church? Jesus' disciples didn't get that. As they followed Jesus, they argued among themselves who was the greatest. What if we did that here? Suppose we had a ranking system to determine which of our church members is the greatest? Is there

anything good that could come from that? No! Nothing! It'd be pure evil and wickedness, because it wouldn't be from God, but from the devil.

Satan is all about power, about grabbing greatness for himself. That's what caused his fall from heaven in the first place. That's what caused him to tempt Adam and Eve to sin against God. There is a limited amount of power in the world. In order to gain more power, someone else must give up some of theirs. In the Lord's Prayer we pray, "*Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory.*" So, all power belongs to God. He is greater than all. Yet, Satan strikes against God's power by tempting His children in Christ to sin and fall from grace so he can claim them for himself. And when we in Christ's church assert power and greatness over others, it's Satan, and not God, who is at work in us. God works through us when we see not greatness in power but greatness in serving.

There's a story I might have shared before about the founder and former CEO of the fast-food restaurant Wendy's, Dave Thomas. Dave was adopted as a child. He never finished high school and he earned his MBA before his GED. He had every reason to say, "*Look what I have accomplished. I am the greatest.*" But, He is the only founder among America's big companies whose picture in the corporate report shows him holding a mop and a plastic bucket. It wasn't a joke. He called it leading by example. At Wendy's, he said, MBA doesn't mean Master of Business Administration. It means Mop Bucket Attitude. It means a commitment to service. Dave Thomas, who died in 2002, was one who saw service as the key to greatness and that's what Jesus is teaching us as well, to have a Mop Bucket Attitude.

Each time we come into this sanctuary, we see images of how God serves us through the cross of Jesus. Here at His altar He gives us His very body and blood forgiving us for every despicable sin we have committed. Here at the font He gives us new birth through His Spirit, exchanging our sinful rags for His pure, righteous garment. Here at His pulpit He speaks to us, as a loving Father to His children, reminding us the many ways that He serves us, and teaching us that we should follow His example of serving because in serving is greatness.

"He took a child and put him in the midst of them, and taking him in his arms, he said to them, 'Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me, receives not me but him who sent me.'" (Mark 9: 36 – 37) This

isn't the greatness that the world promotes, where parenting is seen as being second to your career and where teachers are among the lowest paid of professions. Serving children is a labor of love, and a picture of what God done for us. I'm glad we have people in our church who commit their time to serving children because they know that as they serve children, they're serving God. Martin Luther said of parents, "*Most certainly father and mother are apostles, bishops, and priests to their children, for it is they who make them acquainted with the gospel. In short, there is no greater or nobler authority on earth than that of parents over their children, for this authority is both spiritual and temporal.*" (Luther's Works, 45:46)

A group of European theologians once visited Mother Teresa in Calcutta. She told them, "*You try to do what I am doing, then you will be able to enjoy what I am doing.*" She took them to one of her childcare centers and picked up a child who was playing in the mud and gave the child a kiss. She waited for her guests to do the same. But none of them did. Some say that Jesus chose a child as a way of telling His disciples that they were to serve those who were helpless and in need, regardless of their age. This is how we find greatness in God's eyes, by serving the least and the lowest.

This is at the heart of the Gospel of Christ. This is what we see in the cross of Jesus Christ. Jesus was a servant to each of us so that we would be first in God's kingdom, and He calls each of us to follow His example. "***Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.***" (Philippians 2:3-5)

Jesus shows us what a life of greatness under His cross looks like. It's a life of service, not only to God, but to others. In God's eyes, there is no GOAT, Greatest Of All Time, because God doesn't assign greatness to individual people, but to works done in love for Him. Jesus stood a child before His disciples and, taking him up in His arms said, "***Whoever receives one such child in My name receives Me.***" If you want to see greatness, look to the mother and father who bring their child to be baptized into Christ. Baptism doesn't look great in the eyes of the world, but Jesus says there's nothing greater. Who are the greatest missionaries? Christian parents who raise their children in the fear and love of the Lord. Who are the greatest disciples of Jesus? All who love the Lord by placing themselves, not over, but under others to serve them. True greatness is seen through the cross of Jesus Christ, and it is lived out following His example. Amen.