

September 30, 2012
Pentecost 18

"Jesus Is the Greatest"

MARK 9:30-37

They left that place and passed through Galilee. Jesus did not want anyone to know where they were, ³¹ because he was teaching his disciples. He said to them, "The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men. They will kill him, and after three days he will rise." ³² But they did not understand what he meant and were afraid to ask him about it. ³³ They came to Capernaum. When he was in the house, he asked them, "What were you arguing about on the road?" ³⁴ But they kept quiet because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest. ³⁵ Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, "Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all." ³⁶ He took a little child whom he placed among them. Taking the child in his arms, he said to them, ³⁷ "Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me."

Little children like to brag and boast about being the greatest and the best. "I can run faster than you." "I can throw the ball faster than you." "I have more friends than you." Children will act up in a classroom so they can get more attention for themselves and take it away from others.

A famous boxer, Mohammed Ali, used to taunt his opponents by saying, "I am the greatest." He was great. He proudly boasted he could "dance like a butterfly and sting like a bee." His greatness didn't last. Numerous blows to the head have changed the man with the frenzied feet and ferocious fists. He stumbles to walk and stumbles to talk. Those who brag about being the greatest are eventually reduced to being the least.

In the words just read to you, we see Jesus' disciples arguing among themselves about who is the greatest. They are acting like little children. They sound like Mohammed Ali. We can learn from their example. We don't find greatness in ourselves but we do find greatness in Jesus. Jesus is the greatest and he brings his greatness to us. He even allows us to live on this earth to point other people to his greatness.

Jesus shows us his true greatness

Jesus loved to show people how great he was. "They left that place and passed through Galilee." Jesus went into the towns and villages to show people who he was. He wanted them to see his miracles and listen to his words which proclaimed him as their Lord and God. He wanted people to believe that he was the Christ, the One sent by the Father to rescue people from sin and give them eternal life. He wanted people to see him as the King who would bow down to them as a humble servant and take all their sin upon himself and suffer the torments of hell to pay for the sin that makes us unacceptable to God. He wanted the people of his kingdom to see themselves as sheep resting in his loving arms.

"Jesus did not want anyone to know where they were." He wanted time alone with his

disciples just as he wants time alone with you in his Word where he can still come to you and teach you how much he loves you. The best minutes of your week this past week, and the best minutes of this coming week is the time you spend being alone with Jesus in his Word.

Jesus needed time alone with his disciples to make it clear to them what would be happening to him when he went to the cross. "He said to them, 'The Son of Man will be betrayed into the hands of men. They will kill him, and after three days he will rise.'" He told them he would be betrayed or handed over. Judas handed Jesus over to his enemies in the Garden of Gethsemane so they could tie him up and haul him away as if he were some monstrous criminal. Romans 4 tells us the Jesus was handed over for our offenses. Isaiah 53 said that he would be wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities.

Jesus talked to them about being killed. He did not spare any details. Jesus is the greatest because he was willingly to become one of us, and take our sin upon himself, and die in our place so we could be forgiven. Philippians 2 says of Jesus, "He made himself nothing, and did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness, And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!"

Jesus even told his disciples that he would rise from the dead on the third day. When Jesus rose from the dead the angel told the disciples that he had risen from the dead just as he said he would. When Thomas saw that Jesus had risen from the dead, and even kept the nail prints in his hands, he proclaimed with great joy in his voice, "My Lord and My God." We join the Apostle Paul in proclaiming how great Jesus is with these words, "Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name of that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

Permit a little story about a dog that saved a child to illustrate in a small way the amazing way that Jesus rescued us. A mother was hanging out some wash in the backyard while he little baby girl was playing on the grass next to her. Fear gripped her when she heard the sound of an angry rattlesnake and saw her daughter walking toward the curious sound the snake was making. There was no time to intervene because it was all happening so fast. At the last second before the snake struck her daughter, the family poodle intervened barking loudly. The snake struck at the dog and missed. Then it struck a second time hitting the dog in the face and emptying every bit of venom into the poor poodle. The mother was able to rescue the child but the dog died. The little poodle never realized how poisonous and dangerous the snake was.

Jesus knew the poison of sin that he would be taking on himself and giving his life for us. Sin has bitten us and sunk its deadly fangs into us. Sin was there in us when we were conceived. Sin was there when we were little children. Sin is evident in the way we lived our lives this past week. Because of this sin we are unacceptable to God and destined for eternal death. Romans 3 passes this sweeping condemnation on all people. "There is no one righteous, not even one...All have turned away, they have together become worthless." Jesus became sin for us even though he knew no sin. He intervened for us.

He was delivered for our offenses and raised again for our justification. When he rose from the dead he kept the nail prints in his hands to let us know that he bore the full wrath of God that we deserve so we can be forgiven and be loved and accepted by God.

Because of Jesus death and resurrection we get to share in his greatness. Romans 6 says that through our baptism we died, and were buried and raised with Christ. "We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life." The night before he died Jesus prayed to his Father, "And now Father, give me glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began." The greatness that Jesus now has with his heavenly Father is a greatness that you have, because you have everything that Jesus did for you. His glory is your glory. You are a branch connected to him who is your vine. He is your head and you are his body the church. He is the bridegroom and you are his bride. You are in his kingdom and nothing will separate you from his love. In the lowest moments of your life, nothing will ever take away the greatness that you have in Christ Jesus your Lord. Is it any wonder than the Paul said, "For me to live is Christ and to die is gain."

Jesus could take us home to be with him in glory. Maybe this is the week that Jesus will return in glory to take us to the place where he has prepared for us. If he does not return this week, this life is a golden opportunity to let people see his greatness through us and to serve people with that greatness that can only be found in Jesus.

Jesus allows us to show his true greatness

You would think that as Jesus and disciples travel through Galilee to Capernaum, they would be talking among themselves about Jesus' death and resurrection. But they did not. It says they were afraid to ask him about it. It was too traumatic for them to ask more details. Instead they chose to argue among themselves about who was the greatest. Jesus asked them, "What were you arguing about on the road?" Jesus does not ask them, "What were you talking about?" They were ashamed. They kept quiet. They are so ashamed of how they were arguing and debating about who was the greatest.

Jesus sat them down and gave them an important lesson that we need to hear as well. "If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all." When you know how great Jesus is and how great his love is for you that you have not deserved, it changes you into someone who always wants to serve other people instead of getting lots of attention for yourself.

Something similar happened the night before Jesus died when he celebrated the Passover and Lord's Supper with his disciples. Before they could sit down for the meal they had to wash their feet. There was no servant in the room to pour the water and wash the feet. Peter did not volunteer to wash the other disciples' feet. John did nothing and his brother James did nothing. Jesus wrapped a towel around his waist, poured water into a basin and washed the feet of his disciples. Then he told them, "Now that I your Lord and Teacher have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet." He also told them how blessed they would be if they could learn to serve each other instead of always wanting to be first and get a lot of attention for themselves.

Jesus was so good at teaching important lessons by using objects and different teaching tools to illustrate what he was saying. "He took a little child and had him stand among them. Taking him in his arms, he said to them, 'Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me.'" Little children were near Jesus. Mothers loved to bring their children to Jesus to bless them. He was good with little children. He said, "The kingdom of God belongs to such as these." This was a little child, a toddler. Jesus took the child in his arms and called on his disciples to think of this little child and other people like him rather than always thinking of themselves and arguing who is the greatest. If the Lord does not return in glory this week he gives us another privilege of experiencing the greatness of showing little children, adults, important people, less important people, people who have their act together and people who are messed up the greatness and glory that is theirs in Jesus. Jesus is the greatest. We share in his greatness and we are privileged to point other people to his greatness. Amen.