

Sermon- June 24th 2018 Mark 10:35-45

I Am the Greatest

Grace and peace to you and from our Lord Jesus Christ. Today, we have a Gospel we all can relate to. The disciples are walking along a road with Jesus and a request is made of Jesus. Two of the disciples ask if they can be at his right and left side when He comes in glory. Jimmie and John obviously feel they are the top draft choices. They are the greatest. Of course an argument ensues and the other 10 disciples feel indignant and pretty much say, "who do you think you are?" Then Jesus uses the request and the argument as a teaching moment. Whoever wishes to be great must be a servant. Whoever wishes to be first must be a slave. Greatness comes from serving. Not the other way around.

Boy, can we relate. First we can understand arguments, even among us the faithful ones. I can remember many church council meetings and annual meetings where arguments erupted. Sometimes related to mundane issues like seal coating the parking lot, or pageants at Christmas, or what color to paint the bathrooms. Almost always the argument is about money. Probably because that's what we argue about in our families. Almost never do we argue about which one of us is the greatest. We carry way too much Lutheran guilt to think we are the greatest.

But we can still relate to the text. How many times did we hear Muhammad Ali during interviews with Howard Cosell say, "I Am the Greatest."

Or, the image of Broadway Joe Namath holding his finger in the air after beating the Colts in super Bowl 3. I am number 1. Or watching the NFL draft with anticipation as to who would be the top draft choice.

It even creeps into our vernacular. When we choose a new Pastor here at Our Savior's we will be looking for a top draft choice.

Yes, we understand the disciples. This ego thing. I am much better than you are.

For those of you old enough, you will remember the Irving Berlin musical, Annie Get Your Gun, from 1946. About Frank Butler and Annie Oakley who are both sharp shooting aces who also are in love with each other. They begin to spar about who is better.

"I can do anything better than you can
I can do anything better than you.

No you can't
Yes I can
No you can't
Yes I can"

So Jesus very patiently explains to his disciples and to us what is important in his kingdom. The life we choose as disciples, as followers, is a life that is centered on servanthood. Serving others. Not how important we are. Like it says in the hymn Day by Day. To see thee more clearly, love thee more dearly, follow thee more nearly, Day by Day.

Some remembrances for me.

-Cathy and I volunteered at Loaves and Fishes in downtown Appleton. It is an organization that feeds 100-plus people 3 times a week. For many, that was their only meal that day.

-Stopping at the Shepherd of the Bay food booth at the Sister Bay festival. Enjoying Krumkake and gjetboller and having a long conversation about their upcoming Guatemala mission trip.

-Here at Our Savior's with our Milwaukee Mission Trip and in a few months our Gods Work/Our Hands Sunday.

-Our quilters and our collections for Lutheran World Relief.

I smile when I think of my mother. She was the one who taught me about serving others. For over 30 years, until the age of 86, she volunteered one full day a week at Lutheran Medical Center in Brooklyn. When I asked her why she kept doing it, she would say, "I look forward to helping the elderly." Always wondered what she thought she was?

You have your own story about serving others.

Kind of interesting in our text from Mark. A few verses prior to our Gospel, Jesus welcomes a child. Important because children had little value in 1st century Palestine. Jesus said that unless we become like a child we cannot enter the kingdom of God.

You don't see what I see when I gather the children for the Children's Sermon.

I see eyes full of promise – love and good things are there.

I see eyes full of acceptance- no distinction based on race, gender, or body size.

I see eyes full of helpfulness- they would simply help anyone and everyone.
Children get it- that's what Jesus meant.

Like Broadway Joe aka pantyhose Namath, we are #1. But only in Jesus' eyes.
Why? Because we get it. We are #1 because we serve others. Just like Jesus
taught us.

Amen- let it be so.