

18 S. after Pentecost 9/22/24
Mark 9:30-37 20B

BUT THEY KEPT SILENT, FOR ON THE WAY THEY HAD ARGUED WITH ONE ANOTHER ABOUT WHO WAS THE GREATEST.

“They argued with one another about who was the greatest.” The greatest what? Every time I read these words, I find myself asking: The greatest what? The greatest bowler? The greatest ballroom dancer? The greatest chef?

The Evangelist makes it clear that what they were not arguing about was who was the greatest servant. None of them wanted to be the servant. They wanted greatness. They wanted to be better than all the rest. They wanted God to think more of them than the other 11. So, Jesus teaches them and us. HE TEACHES US THAT JUST AS GOD HIMSELF IS A SERVANT, WE ARE TO BE A REFLECTION OF OUR CREATOR. JESUS HAS SET US FREE TO BE A SERVANT.

Think about these guys for a minute. Tacky. Rude. Incredibly insensitive. Jesus has just told them that He is going to be delivered into the hands of sinful men and they are going to kill him. They respond by turning a deaf ear to Him who came not to be served but to serve and began **arguing** with one another about which of them was the greatest.

I. That is the way of the sinful flesh. We poor sinners measure greatness in a completely opposite way than does God. We believe greatness is measured by how much power you have over others. When we think of greatness, we think of being worshiped, served, glorified by others. That's why our world idolizes movie stars, rock singers and professional athletes. The Old Adam looks at wealth and fame, "Now, that's greatness, and I've got to have it!"

The measure of greatness is completely opposite between God and man.

II. By nature, the almighty God of heaven and earth is...a servant. He created Adam and Eve so that He might provide for them. He created them in His own image to be servants to one another, to creation and to their children. When they sinned, He did not respond with raw power and wipe them from the face of the earth. Instead, He promised a Savior; in other words, He promised that He would serve them by delivering them from sin and death and hell to heaven and everlasting life. Consider those words that you know so very well, *God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son (Jn. 3:16)*.

In our Gospel reading today, Jesus is again teaching this Good News to His disciples, *"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."* This is the service of God to us poor sinners: Very God of Very God humbled Himself to be born of a virgin, become a man, suffer the judgement and wrath of God in our place, die on the cross as the wages of our sin, and rise again the 3rd day to bring life and immortality to all who believe.

III. God is, by nature, a servant.

God knit you together in your mother's womb and breathed His very life into you. This very day, God our Maker opens His Father hand to provide all that you need for your body and life. And, He also continues to serve you by the proclamation of His Word and the administration of His Sacraments, because that is where He gives the forgiveness that His Son Jesus has won upon the cross. That's why you are here this morning for

the "Divine Service". We call it the Divine Service, not because we serve the Divine, but rather, the Divine comes and serves us.

The Lord remains the Servant. He went to the cross and died for the sins of the world in service to all, and He still comes here to do His work in us through the means of grace. It is through these means that He does His work in you – strengthening, empowering, enabling you to live as the new creation you are in Christ.

He does that because Christ serves your neighbor through you. The Lord is a servant who sets you free **from** sin to be a servant; and that sets you free **for** a life of servanthood and contentment in that service. The Lord has placed you where you have the opportunity and the ability to serve where He has placed you. Parents serve their children, and children serve and honor their parents. Husbands serve wives, wives serve husbands. Employees serve companies and customers, employers serve employees. Church members serve on committees and boards. Whatever vocations you have, the Lord has placed you there to serve.

This is the life of the Christian: Set free from sin by Jesus, the Servant who suffered the cross for us, we are set free to serve wherever the Lord has placed us. When God measures greatness, He measures it in terms of serving, "*If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all.*" In our lesson, Jesus teaches this with an object lesson,

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."

Jesus is teaching us that we are to serve the most vulnerable and the least among us – children, infants. Yes, most certainly, we are to care for them with clothing, food, and shelter.

But, Jesus is not just teaching us to be kind to children. Our Savior came into the world to serve the world, even children, to take away their sins and give them eternal life. He is teaching us in our vocation as parents, grandparents, adults, we are to receive even little children in His name.

To receive a little child in Jesus' name is to put the name of Jesus on that child: This happens in Baptism, where the words are spoken, "I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." It is at Baptism that the Lord places His name upon His child and makes that child His very own. Once a child is received in Jesus' name through Holy Baptism, we are called upon to keep that child in Jesus' name. We are to nurture that child with the Word so that the faith God began in their baptism will be alive and strong and well.

The greatest service you can render to your child is to teach them the Word of God. Food, clothing, home, manners -- all of this is part of the service you render to children. But, as you care for your child's body and mind, do not neglect their soul. Read Bible stories and memorize Bible passages with them. You yourself do not know when the hour of trial will come, not just for you child, but for you. Read and memorize the Small Catechism with them. Pray with them. Talk about the Gospel and the Lord's grace and goodness each day. Tell them how happy you are that Jesus will take you to heaven to be with Him when you die.

No one needs to tell you that this is not an easy task. By the time the work and school day is done, there seems to be little energy – even desire – to hear and learn God's Word. But, given how much the devil and the world hate the Word of God, would you really expect it to be easy? No. But, we have Jesus and we can do all things in Him who is our Strength.

Teach your children of the Lord's love, and rejoice that the Lord continues to serve you and your children with His grace.

The harvest is soon over. The temperatures are cooling. The sunny summer days are growing darker ever sooner. The theme of the season of Pentecost is Living a Christian Life. The changes in nature around us remind us that that theme more narrowly focuses at the end of the season of Pentecost to Living a Christian Life in conflict with Satan. But in all the strife of mortal life, we have God's own promise: *Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you*, to serve you with His grace in Jesus Christ (Ja 4:8).

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.