

## That is Great

P24 Yr B Mark 10:35-45 October 17, 2021

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The other disciples are angry with James and John. They are angry because the brothers approach Jesus and say “Teacher, give us whatever it is that we ask of you.” Now if you have ever heard someone start a request with a phrase like “give me what I want” that you know that what comes after isn’t going to be reasonable. And what the two disciples ask for certainly is certainly outrageous.

They want Jesus to give them places of honor, places of authority and respect in the coming kingdom. In other words they want to share in Jesus’ victory, triumph, and power. The disciples know that Jesus is the Messiah and they hope, believe, and trust that he has come to usher in the salvation that God promised to the people. Jesus is going to establish something greater, something eternal, and James and John want to be right there running it when that happens. They want positions of authority and honor.

And after listening to their request Jesus says “You don’t know what you are asking.” Because remember that Jesus is heading for the cross and when he comes into his glory it isn’t at the head of an army, or on a throne ruling an Empire, but when he is suffering and dying at Calvary. James and John think they are asking for ease and luxury and power but that is not where Jesus is headed which is why Jesus asks them if they can drink the cup he is about to drink and be baptized with the baptism he will experience.

Because remember in the Garden of Gethsemane just before his betrayal and death Jesus prays about the cup, the suffering he is about to go through. And I know that isn’t what the disciples want to experience. And the baptism Jesus is speaking about is his death on the cross for only by his death can God bring about the shattering of sin and the renewal of the world through the resurrection. And I know that isn’t what the disciples want to go through.

James and John ask to be on his right and his left and there were people on his right and his left when Jesus died on the cross, two thieves one of whom rejected Jesus and the other who embraced the forgiveness he was offered. James and John were not there that day beside Jesus when, to use their words, he came into his glory. Yet I think its important to note that Jesus tells them that while they can share in his cup and his baptism that it is not for him to give them places of honour and respect.

Because James and John are thinking they will get prestige and status by staying as close as they can to Jesus. But Jesus knows that his path is going to lead to rejection and suffering and death on the cross. Two completely different ideas of what is going to happen. And yet not everything is a loss because Jesus knows that in time the two will experience the greatness God is calling them to because they are his disciples and will walk as his witnesses to the world.

But at this moment the other disciples hear that the brothers ask Jesus for a favour and positions of honor and they get angry. The word Mark uses in Greek is actually the same word used to describe how Jesus reacts when the disciples are turning away the children looking to come to him. So the others are upset, angry, at James and John. They don't want those two disciples presuming to be greater than them and asking for places of honor because, well each disciple assumes that they are greater than all the others.

Which is why Jesus teaches them a lesson about what it means to be great. Jesus tells them that being great is not about having the places of honor, or status, or having people serve you. Because while all around the disciples there are people everyone assumes are the greatest- the king and emperors, the people who everyone serves and whose commands are always followed- Jesus says they aren't the greatest.

No, Jesus flips the idea of greatness upside down by talking about how the greatest in the kingdom of God is actually the one who serves. Those whose actions help others not themselves. Those whose efforts enrich the lives of those around them. Those whose focus is not on making themselves great but on lifting up those in need.

The word Jesus uses in Greek for how we are to act in order to be great is diakonos (dee-ak'-on-os) the same word which gives us deacon or diaconal. Which is why sometimes what Jesus says is translated "whoever wants to be great among you shall be your minister" and I like the spiritual element that adds to our calling. We are great when we are working to bring God into the life of another person. To be the means by which they find hope, know forgiveness, experience grace in their lives. When we by our actions and words let the light of Christ shine through us not to draw attention to ourselves but to brighten the life of someone else.

And then Jesus says whoever wants to be first has to be the slave or the servant of all. And the word Jesus uses isn't the same as the one earlier. Because now Jesus is talking about the attitude the approach we are to take. A servant's role is to serve. Period. That's how we become great. We take the role, the humility, the attitude of putting others before us- of serving. For Jesus says that where our greatness in faith will come from. And then he ties that into himself as he talks about how he comes to this world to be the servant of all and to give his life as a ransom for many.

Now I know that we've heard this message many times before in church and once already this fall. The truth is that Jesus talks about greatness on many occasions with the disciples in order for them to see the way he is walking and the path they are to follow. And our world, just like the world of the disciples, has a opposite set of values as to what makes us great, so I think it is important for us to hear what Jesus says over and over.

The way we are to live as disciples, as followers of Jesus, as people of faith is by being servants. By caring for each others, by giving to each other, by not seeing ourselves as better but seeing the value in others. Look at the people next to you, think of the people in your life, imagine the people you encounter each day. Those are the people Jesus says you are to bring the light and hope of the Gospel to by helping them, caring for them, being patient with them, and well serving them. Be there for them and share your life with them. That is how you become great.

Because that is what God does in Jesus. Jesus doesn't come to force his rule on us but to share the kingdom of God with us. Jesus doesn't come so that we can tremble at the might and glory of God but so that God can lift us up. Jesus doesn't come to be a distant figure of authority but a servant king who calls us to do as he does in our lives.

For that is where greatness lies. By letting our lives be the means by which others see and know God. By focusing our lives on helping and caring for others. By giving what we have been given for the good of the world. Because that is the way of Jesus and that is what is what is great in the eyes of God.