

Worship Service for September 19th: 17th Sunday after Pentecost.

- **Old Testament:** Jeremiah 11:18-20
- **New Testament:** Mark 9:30-37
- **Psalms:** Psalm 54

Announcements: Next Sunday, September 26th is food bank Sunday.

Sermon Title: Servanthood!

In our lesson today, Jesus, for the second time out of three in Mark's gospel, informs his disciples of what awaits him in Jerusalem. He tells them that he is going to die and will resurrect on the third day. We are told that the disciples didn't understand what Jesus meant when he said he was going to be killed and return to life three days later. They were afraid to ask him what he meant. Yet it seemed to have triggered a debate because they were now arguing about which of them was the greatest.

Were they wondering who was going to oversee their group when Jesus died? They were probably giving points as to why they were the greatest and therefore should be in charge. Sounds like our politicians. Right now, in this country we are going through election campaigns and our politicians are acting exactly like the disciples or even worse. Each person is bringing up arguments as to why they are better than the others and why they should be elected.

We live in a society and culture which defines greatness in terms of power and authority. And because of this, people are constantly trying to be greater than everyone else and they turn to portray that in a lot of ugly ways. Easy for us to criticize politicians because they have a larger platform. But how different are we from them? Even though we are Christians, do we not operate like the rest of the world, defining greatness in terms of power and authority?

When we pursue greatness as the world does, we will step on other people's toes and if we think that anyone is standing in our way, we will find ways of getting them out of our way. So far in the elections, what I have heard the most from the two dominating parties is them trying to put each other down. When you are on Facebook, these annoying adverts come up where it is either Trudeau saying bad things about O'Toole, or O'Toole saying bad things about Trudeau. And I keep saying, as if they will hear me, stop talking about each other and talk about

yourselves. Tell us what you are offering and not what the other person will not offer or do right.”

This morning Jesus is presenting to us something totally different. Always turning the culture upside down and reminding us that we are in the world and not of the world. He shows up with an entirely different set of values. He calls the twelve together and says, “anyone wanting to be the greatest must be the least – the servant of all!”

Jesus didn't come to make himself popular, he didn't come to make himself a king or to sit on a throne. He came to love. He didn't come to be the greatest he came to be the least. He didn't come to sit among kings but to die as a common criminal. In fact, Philippians 2:5-8 tells us, *“Your attitude should be the kind that was shown us by Jesus Christ, who, though he was God, did not demand and cling to his rights as God, but laid aside his mighty power and glory, taking the disguise of a slave/servant and becoming like men. And he humbled himself even further, going so far as actually to die a criminal's death on a cross.”*

Jesus came to embrace the least and to become the least and he proved this by dining with tax collectors and other sinners that others shunned by their society, he washed the feet of his disciples, rejected the devil's offer of fame, power and authority and chose to become a servant and die like a criminal because he was interested in obeying his Father and sacrificing his life on the cross for our sins.

And in order to make his point clear enough he picks up a child and tells his disciples “anyone who welcomes a little child like this in my name is welcoming me, and anyone who welcomes me is welcoming my Father who sent me!” Aside from normal family affection, children were overlooked in the ancient world; they had no status or prestige. Accepting a child was lowering yourself in that society. Children are considered important and treated as such today.

However, Jesus' point to his disciples and to us is that they and we wouldn't gain any particular favour or social standing for being his followers. When we welcome a child, we are welcoming someone who cannot give us anything in return, someone who cannot give us the kind of recognition we will normally desire, someone who cannot give us the greatness we seek. He declares that to welcome one who is powerless and vulnerable is also to welcome him and to welcome him is to welcome His Father.

Being great as followers of Christ means putting others first and not being self-seeking. It is about the love of the Almighty God who lowers Himself to a sinful world to be beaten, mocked, and killed for our salvation and freedom. We portray greatness when we love the least, the downtrodden, the sinner, the hurting, the lost, the obnoxious. Jesus is inviting us to a service of humble care, hospitality, and love. 1 Corinthians 10:24 says “nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others.”

When the apostle Paul asked Christians in Philippi to consider the humility of Jesus in Philippians 2:5-8, he used a word that describes the attitude of those willing to be counted among servants. More importantly, he wanted them to remember that those who live in the spirit of Jesus do so in the awareness that He first humbled Himself for us. It wasn't just a thought. Long before that, the prophet Isaiah had described a mysterious “servant” as being despised, rejected, and familiar with pain and suffering. Before alluding to this person's true honor and glory, the prophet went on to anticipate that He'd be held in such low esteem that people would find it hard to even look at Him (Isaiah 53:3).

So too today, those who lower themselves for the good of others in the spirit of Jesus express the humility of our Saviour who is “in very nature God.” And if we read further in Philippians 2:9-11 it tell us that “Yet it was because of this that God raised him up to the heights of heaven and gave him a name which is above every other name, that at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” The “greatest” greatness we can achieve in this world and in the world to come is that which comes from our Father in heaven.

Our goal as is not to take the glory for the things that God is doing through us but to return all the glory back to Him. David cried out in Psalms 139:23-24 “Search me, O God, and know my heart; test my thoughts. Point out anything you find in me that makes you sad and lead me along the path of everlasting life.” My prayer is that we too will cry out to God to search our hearts and lead us in the everlasting paths of Christ-like service which is the true path to greatness. And for anyone who has not yet received God's forgiveness and salvation may you do so today even as you repent of your sins and come to Jesus. Amen.

Prayer

God of power and might: in Christ Jesus, you emptied yourself of all your prerogatives and became the servant of all. Receive us into your presence through his saving grace, and hear our prayers – we pray

+ For church leaders – that they may emulate his example as they serve the church...

+ For all who follow Jesus – that we may learn to put the interests of others first...

+ For all who are persecuted – that they may be delivered from evil and find safe haven...

+ For all who are dispossessed – that they may receive the help needed for restoration...

+ For all who are weak and vulnerable – that they may be happily welcomed into your family...

+ For all who are seeking peace in conflict – that they may find a just and honorable way...

+ For all who have died in Christ – that they may experience your perfect, eternal, peace...

God of power and might, you uphold our lives and keep us in your care, help us in these our needs and more, we pray, through Christ our Lord who taught us to pray saying...

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

Benediction

Go in peace, love, care, and service to one another in Christ's name. And may God smile upon your every moment, may the Holy Spirit energize your every hour, and may the Living Word order your steps this day and forevermore. Amen.