

Mark 9:30-37

Pentecost 18, September 19, 2021

Three younger boys were on a playground bragging about everything. Eventually, they began to brag about their dads. One said, *“O yeah, my dad scribbles some words on a piece of paper and calls it a poem, and he gets paid a \$100 for it.”* The next boy said: *“O yeah, my dad scribbles some words on a piece of paper and calls it a song, and he gets paid \$200.”* Finally, the third boy said: *“My dad scribbles some words on a piece of paper and calls it a sermon and then he collects money from everyone in the room.”* Boys will be boys and they like to brag about everything.

It's not just young boys who like to brag. Those young boys will become big boys and they still like to brag by telling fish stories, their last golf game, their last softball or football game. Maybe, it's just a guy thing? In many ways, the disciples were acting like young boys. So, Jesus is going to teach them a lesson about greatness.

Here in Mark 9, they were acting like boys in a classroom. They got distracted. **“³⁰ 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.”** Even though this wasn't the first time that Jesus talked about his death and resurrection, they still weren't getting it. So, they began to get distracted and then began to talk about who was the greatest of the disciples.

You can almost imagine how their argument went. Peter may have piped up first: *“I'm the spokesman for this group, and it was my confession that Jesus said was the rock on which he'd build his church and the gates of hell would never overtake it. After all, I walked on water with Jesus.”* Then maybe Judas: *“Oh yeah, but you sank. Who's the keeper of the money around here? I've got the money; therefore, I have the power. After all, money means power.”* Then maybe Matthew would join in: *“You want to talk about money? I had lots of it as a tax collector. I was really good at what I did. Look how much I left behind to join this group.”* Then maybe Andrew said: *“I was the first disciple. I've got seniority.”* Then James and John could say to Peter: *“My brother and I are the greatest. After all, we were the only brothers who were up there on that Mount and saw Jesus transfigured.”* Then, finally, John: *“But I'm the disciple that Jesus loves!”* They all had ambitions for themselves, and weren't looking at the needs of others.

How could they act like that? However, it's pretty easy to see why they acted that way. We all want to be great or be on a great team. We want to cheer on our favorite team for being the greatest. For example, how about those Green Bay Packers last Sunday? They were pretty great weren't they? I was getting so frustrated that I went outside and sprayed weed killer on the weeds around the house and church. At least it was more productive than they were. Before the Bears, Lions and Viking fans say anything, they are all 0-1. We want to be great. We want to be successful in our jobs. We all want to raise kids who will be successful in whatever they do. We want good grades on a report card. We all want to get the best deal on something. So, we'll spend hours online just to make sure we can find the best deal. And when we do, we feel pretty proud of ourselves. I've gotten really good at figuring out the best deal to travel somewhere. I'll sit there for hours on my I-pad at home at night and watching TV and search and search for the best deal.

Please don't misunderstand me. None of those things are bad. But it is really easy to get all wrapped up in greatness that we're not much different than the disciples. At this point in Jesus' ministry, he was at the height of his popularity. The crowds were there. The disciples could almost feel the power that they had by being one of the twelve. But Jesus was about to teach them a lesson about greatness. So, he takes his disciples aside and tells them that he would soon be going in front of another crowd. That crowd was not going to be nice to him at all. **“The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men. They will kill him.”** Not quite the greatness they wanted. For a while, Jesus just let his disciples to continue in the bragging war that they were having.

Then he comes to them and says: *“By the way boys, “What were you arguing about on the road?”* My guess is that suddenly the disciples had that look like a deer in the headlights. Suddenly, they had nothing more to say. Now Jesus had their attention. Mark records: **“But they kept quiet because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest.”** Now that he has their attention, Jesus was going to use a small child as a prop to help him teach the real definition of greatness in the kingdom of God. You see, true greatness is found in the service we do for others. Jesus

says: **“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.”** True greatness is found in the way that you may treat a young child. You are more than willing to help a child or give them the best you can. It’s kind of like when one of my grandkids look at me in the eye and say: *“Grandpa, can you give me...”* Sometimes, how can you say no to that smile on the face. Seriously though, a young child needs our serving. There are things that they can’t do for themselves. So we are happy to give them our time, make sure they have clothes on their back and food in their bellies. When you help a child in such a way, you are not saying that you are first. But you are saying that they are first. Jesus is saying that in the same way you might treat a young child, that is the way that treat one another.

Why? Then Jesus gives the perfect example of service: **“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.”** God didn’t have to send his Son. Jesus didn’t have to go to the cross. Yet, he does. Jesus had nothing to gain for himself by being delivered into the hands of men. But we had everything to gain from his service and greatness. Jesus takes us in his arms, places us on his lap and wraps us with his love. No strings attached. This is how I served you. Serve one another with the same love that I have for you. May God help all of us to do that. Amen.