

Lent 5
"The Greatest is Your Servant" (Mark 10:42-45)
March 17, 2024
Rev. Ed Weber

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, our text for this 4th Sunday in Lent is from our Gospel reading, Mark 10:42-45.

"42 But Jesus called them to Himself and said to them, "You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them.43 Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. 44 And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. 45 For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.""

So far the text.

Does anyone see the GOAT in today's gospel reading? You know, the acronym "GOAT" ...the greatest of all time. People love to debate who is the greatest president...on President's day, you know rank them..., who is the greatest quarterback in football...most people lean toward Tom Brady...who is the greatest basketball player...again, most people lean toward Lebron James...

Whatever profession you choose...music, Lutheran Hour Speaker, brain surgeon, actor, actress, Olympic champion, July 4th hot dog eater...does anyone know his name? people like to come to a conclusion who is the greatest.

In Greek, the word for great is "mega". We get words like "megahit, megabucks, meglomaniac", and if you went to the stock show this week, you could buy a special bracelet that cost you \$30 bucks that's called a "megapass". With it you can ride as many carnival rides as you want for one day. That seems like a mega headache to me, but kids love it.

Well, James and John in our text from Mark 10, came to Jesus with a mega request, egged on by their mother Salome. Yes, it was a request even though they

framed it as a petition. “We want you to give to us, grant to us, whatever we ask”. Jesus, with much patience listens to them and responds with even more patience. James and John want to be the GOATS in the Kingdom of God. They want to sit on the right and left hand of Jesus. They are wannabe GOATS.

For to be the real GOAT in the Kingdom of God is all about mega service. Jesus, explains the greatest is your servant. Jesus uses the word from which we get the word “deacon”. For example, as soon as Peter’s mother-in-law was healed of her fever, as we heard back in the 5th Sunday of Epiphany, she served Jesus and the disciples. She “deaconized” them.

Jesus tells James and John, and us, that to be great in God’s Kingdom, means being willing to drink the cup that Jesus drinks, that is the cup of extreme service to God and the world that will include great suffering and death. To be first means to be not just a servant, but a slave (doulos) of all... Yes, you heard that right. And this is the word, slave, that Paul uses when he says this in 1 Corinthians 9.

“19 For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant (doulos) to all, that I might win the more; 20 and to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law, that I might win those who are under the law; 21 to those who are without law, as without law (not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ), that I might win those who are without law; 22 to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. 23 Now this I do for the gospel’s sake, that I may be partaker of it with you.”

So, to summarize, Jesus is saying that to become the greatest involves drinking the cup of suffering and, for the sake of saving others with the Gospel, become a slave to them.

Here’s one more verse to help us understand the suffering part, from Romans 8.

“16 The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, 17 and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.”

The Spirit bears witness to our spirit that we are joined together with Christ through faith in Him. So that what is Christ's is also mine as a child of God...joint heirs with Him of the Kingdom of God, joint suffering with Him in this world, and joint glorification with Him in heaven.

Which brings us to the most important point of this passage...the GOAT is Jesus. The Greatest Of All Time is Jesus. And united with Him through faith, we also receive His glory!

But, in order to become the Greatest of All Time – Jesus Himself did what He told His disciple one has to do – become your Servant – your suffering Servant that is.

The disciples noticed that as they were walking to Jerusalem, Jesus pace had changed. He walked in front of them with a determination in His step.

“32 Now they were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was going before them; and they were amazed. And as they followed they were afraid.”

And Jesus took them aside to explain what He was focusing on.

“Then He took the twelve aside again and began to tell them the things that would happen to Him: 33 “Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and to the scribes; and they will condemn Him to death and deliver Him to the Gentiles; 34 and they will mock Him, and scourge Him, and spit on Him, and kill Him. And the third day He will rise again.”

And that is greatness...betrayal, condemnation, scourging, death. For this death would forgive us of all our arrogance, boastfulness, bragging, conceit, egoism, self-absorption, self-admiration, self-aggrandizement, self-centeredness...basically all our great notions of self. For as sinners, we have nothing to boast of.

The sacrifices of real goats and bulls reminded the Israelites that they were in continual need of forgiveness for their sins. The high priest made these sacrifices as we heard in our epistle from Hebrews 10.

“For every high priest taken from among men is appointed for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins. 2 He can have compassion on those who are ignorant and going astray, since he himself is also subject to weakness. 3 Because of this he is required as for the people, so also for himself, to offer sacrifices for sins.”

The high priest and the people, and all of us have gone astray and a sacrifice for sins was necessary. But the blood of bulls and goats could never pay for our sins. So, God sent His only begotten Son, Jesus. So Jesus explains to us in our Gospel – **“45 For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”**

Jesus gave His life to pay our great ransom for all our sins and free us from our sinful captivity. Jesus gave His life so that He could give us the Kingdom of Heaven! And by Jesus death, the new covenant was made as we heard prophesized in the Old Testament reading from Jeremiah 31. And there is good news...the greatest news for us sinners.

“For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.”

No more. Because the greatest suffering and death was done for you and me once and for all by Jesus. And not leaving Jesus disciples without comfort, He tells them that He will rise again on the 3rd day. Yes, the GOAT will defeat death itself for all the world. And He did!

So, do you want to be great? No, not like the world thinks of greatness...lording over others, using power by any means necessary to put others under their control...no none of that. Do you want to be great? Learn from the Greatest - Jesus. Learn how He loved us so much that He was willing to give His life for the sake of the Gospel – to free the world of sins domination.

He has done this for you, child of God. And the Spirit says to your spirit, now be a servant to all, a deacon to all and endure any and all suffering of the cup that God appoints for you to drink. For you will also be glorified with Jesus and this will be a mega eternity of glory in heaven. All glory to our High Priest Jesus! Amen **“And this peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” Amen. (Philippians 4:7)**