

Pastor Charmain Bailey Foutner  
Central United Church Windsor

**The Greatest In The Kingdom** (*Sermon theme by Rev. Darren Ethier*)

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Mark : 9:30-37

**Mark 9: 30-37:** They left that place and passed through Galilee. Jesus did not want anyone to know where they were, <sup>31</sup> 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.” <sup>32</sup> But they did not understand what he meant and were afraid to ask him about it.

<sup>33</sup> They came to Capernaum. When he was in the house, he asked them, “What were you arguing about on the road?”<sup>34</sup> But they kept quiet because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest.

<sup>35</sup> Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, “Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all.”

<sup>36</sup> He took a little child whom he placed among them. Taking the child in his arms, he said to them, <sup>37</sup> “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.”

**Reflection:** It's really fun to listen to children tell stories isn't it? The way they see the world is so interesting. Here's a fun story told by a Rev. Ethier:

'At church one morning, my friend was about to start her 4-year-olds' Sunday school class when a little boy showed up without any identification. My friend managed to get his first name, but couldn't find out his last name. "Brian, what's your daddy's name?" she asked. "Daddy," he replied. She tried again, "Brian, what's your mommy's name?" "Mommy," he answered. Suddenly she realized exactly how she could get the answer she needed. "Brian, what does your daddy call your mommy?" His face lit up. With a grin and a deep voice, he replied, "Hey, Babe." –

For Jesus, there was much more to children than their abilities to make us chuckle. Jesus says that it is children who we model life off, if we were to be a part of the kingdom of God.

In fact, Jesus said that there is truth that only a child can teach us about the conditions for entrance and greatness in the kingdom of Heaven. Jesus was not joking when He took a child and told His disciples that they had to become like a child before they could enter, or grow up in God's kingdom. In fact, Jesus makes it very clear: The key to spiritual life and growth is a child-like humility.

**GREATNESS IS NOT MEASURED BY HAUTINESS OR PRIDE.**

People are strange: they want the front of the bus, the back of the church, and the center of attention. Jesus and His disciples are in Capernaum, probably at Peter's house, when they begin discussing among themselves a question that came up all too frequently: who then is greatest in the kingdom of Heaven?

The word greatest here literally means: greatest, largest, eldest, strongest. It was a term that implied a higher position as a result of age, ambition, or just sheer power. By adding the words in the kingdom of Heaven (or kingdom of God) they were asking Jesus which one of them was the most spiritually mature, and thus the most worthy of occupying the highest position of power next to Christ.

Our scripture tells us that they were actually arguing about this, and we can be sure that each had their reasons for thinking that they were the most spiritually mature.

Peter was the spokesman, whom Jesus had nicknamed the Rock. He would surely be the greatest. John protests that even if Peter did have a big mouth, John was His favorite, because he usually called himself the disciple that Jesus loved.

Matthew took this opportunity to point out the fact that he had left a very lucrative position as tax-collector to follow Jesus. Andrews reminds them that he was the first to follow Him. And Judas, the man with the money, no doubt mentioned his trustworthiness.

Now they all waited for Jesus to settle this dispute for them. And with a sigh, He was going to try to teach them that the way to climb the ladder in the kingdom was not up, but down.

But human pride always wants to clear its own path to greatness. Pride is a dangerously deceitful attitude that can even poison the water of spirituality. It is too easy to think that our service to God earns us some special place of honor, as if the more we do, the more valuable and important we are to God, and that that makes us higher and better we are than those around us.

When will we learn that we do not have to earn God's love? God loves us now, and though he graces us in an unlimited way, what we do in

service of God and the kingdom, does not make God love us any more or any less.

We must be sure that our service to each other, or work in God's kingdom is not to feed our pride, or to make us pat ourselves on the back for how good we are. Jesus says that our spiritual life and growth in the kingdom is not based on our goodness, but on God's grace.

Which one of us is the greatest, the disciples argued..... GREATNESS IS MEASURED BY HUMILITY.

The disciples meant to use the word greatest in the sense of being most important, but perhaps Jesus wanted to use it in the sense of being grown up, or mature...

That is what makes His choice of explaining what greatness in God's kingdom looks like, very interesting. Jesus is using a child as an object lesson to these self-seeking men. He is going to use a child to teach them how to mature spiritually.

As the child stands there among the startled disciples, Jesus drops a bombshell. He 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."

Jesus tells them that the key to growing in the kingdom involves another important attitude, which He describes as becoming humble ... as this little child. With the little child still standing there before them, Jesus says that they have to become like a kid before they can grow up in God's kingdom. I mean, let's look at the attributes of a kid...

Humility.... Without power or rights, children were low in more than just stature; they had no voice in the home, the city, or the nation. Their primary duty was to respect and obey their parents and elders.

Then there's Trust, then and even today, children will believe what most adults say to them. This is especially true of a parent, whom a small son or daughter will trust implicitly unless that trust is violated.

Dependence, that aspect of humility found in children is in the fact that they are utterly dependent on their parents for even their basic necessities of life, as well as the emotional support and education that they need to survive.

Jesus is saying here that spiritual life begins with a change in direction in our hearts and minds. We cannot keep going in the direction of our own choosing and expect to meet God at the end of our journey. If we are going to come to know God, we must turn around and go the other way. It's like an intentional once a man, twice a child move.

But when we turn, we find that we are no longer walking alone. Like a child, Jesus says that we begin to trust Something higher, Something stronger, Something that is working for our good, that wants to help us, to lead us, to provide for us.

Can you see here that Jesus is telling his disciples and telling us that all of the guidance, all of the strength, all our provisions in life come from this greater energy, comes this greater source, we're fooling ourselves to think that we're standing on our own and we're all we need and it's our own greatness that enabling us to live or function.

Jesus is urging us to change our direction. To allow our spirituality to be nurtured like a child. To be vulnerable to God, and to let God have sway in our lives. Allow God to nurture us and to care for us... Do you not sometimes feel so tired and overwhelmed? Like you're swimming upstream, and you just want that ease, that carefreeness that children experience...

Jesus is suggesting that it's possible, and that in fact, it's necessary if you are to live your best spiritual life, it's necessary if you are to be effective in God's kingdom. We thank God that we don't have to carry the burden of being the great one or the greatest one, we just need to be ourselves, authentic and open to the Spirit's guidance, moldable to God's will, like a child to a parent, Amen.

**Prayers of the People:** God, like the Israelites in the wilderness, we too have known Your love, and experienced Your care and provision. You invite us to extend that love to the world around us— to care for others as deeply as we care for ourselves. And so we bring the needs of our world before You now.

In Your mercy, hear our prayer. We pray for the many who do not have enough: enough food to eat, or shelter to keep warm; enough employment, or money to pay their bills; enough medicine or medical care. Lord, in Your mercy, hear our prayer.

We also pray for those who have more than enough, but who still struggle to find meaning and purpose in life; who indulge in dangerous or self-serving activities to dull their pain or loneliness. Lord, in Your mercy, hear our prayer.

God, Your grace reaches out to all of us. You call us to live as citizens of heaven, working together with one heart and mind. Strengthen us to live in a manner worthy of the Good News we have received, offering our lives in service of Your kingdom, where the last are first, and the first are last, and there is grace enough for all. Lord, in Your mercy, hear our prayer.

We pray for our church community and our families, our shutins.....

We pray for those on our hearts and minds.....

We pray for our Country, and join with the world churches in prayers for Argentina, Paraguay, Uruguay.

We pray all these in the name of Jesus.....