

18th Sunday after Pentecost  
“Servant greatness offered to all through Jesus!” Mark 9:30-37  
September 22, 2024  
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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 the Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost is from our Gospel reading, Mark 9:30-37. But we begin by reading the opening verses of our Gospel reading, verses 30-32,

**30 Then they departed from there and passed through Galilee, and He did not want anyone to know it. 31 For He taught His disciples and said to them, “The Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of men, and they will kill Him. And after He is killed, He will rise the third day.” 32 But they did not understand this saying, and were afraid to ask Him.**

**So far our text.**

Jesus wanted to have some time with His disciples. Some alone time...away from the crowds...so that He could align their thinking with His. The disciples had just witnessed with the crowd Jesus’ amazing power over a demon. What no one could do throughout this demon possessed boy’s childhood, what the disciples could not do because of their little faith, Jesus did! He drove out the demon and the boy was given to his father, free from the epileptic torments he had endured.

The crowds reaction as we hear in the parallel reading from Luke 9 is amazement.

**“43 And they were all amazed at the majesty of God.**

**But while everyone marveled at all the things which Jesus did, He said to His disciples, 44 “Let these words sink down into your ears, for the Son of Man is about to be betrayed into the hands of men.” 45 But they did not understand this saying, and it was hidden from them so that they did not perceive it; and they were afraid to ask Him about this saying.”**

Everyone, the disciples included, marveled...saw greatness... saw majesty. And yet, this was not the central message of Jesus coming. What was the message? Christ crucified! Jesus - crucified, died and risen! Jesus – Servant of all!

Oh, how hard it was for the disciples and us included to keep this message ever before us. For emphasis, Jesus says, “Let these words sink into your ears”. Jesus will be betrayed, killed and rise again on the third day.

This was the conversation that Jesus had with Moses and Elijah on the top of the mountain when He was transfigured. All of Jesus’ glory, all of Jesus’ majesty and greatness would be willingly given up to save a self-centered, prideful, sinful humanity.

What do we know so well from Philippians 2?

**“Christ Jesus, 6 who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, 7 but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.”**

Bondservant equals greatness. What was that you were talking about on the road again?

**“33 Then He came to Capernaum. And when He was in the house He asked them, “What was it you disputed among yourselves on the road?” 34 But they kept silent, for on the road they had disputed among themselves who would be the greatest. 35 And He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, “If anyone desires to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all.”**

There was silence. They must have been talking loud enough that Jesus heard their self-serving conversation. Of course, being omniscient, Jesus knew exactly their thoughts and words. And He knows ours. The disciples weren’t talking much now though. There was silence, an embarrassing silence. What Jesus told them to let sink into their ears had gone in one ear and out the other.

It's tough to stay focused on the message of Christ crucified, Servant of all, when the world wants us to focus on me, me, me and how I am the greatest of all. There is even an acronym for it. G.O.A.T. It describes the level of success that only the very few ever achieve. Greatest Of All Time. The greatest QB, tennis player, hockey player, president, poet, singer, artist, scientist...whatever field, there is someone is viewed by others as the

greatest. And God wants us to use our talents to the greatest of our abilities, but there is greatness that supersedes, that dwarfs what the world considers to be great. What is that greatness? It is a greatness that Jesus offers to all people and demands from all people, you and me.

**“If anyone desires to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all.”** No restrictions, no limitations, anyone can be first. How? By being the servant of all. As we hear in Luke 9, the parallel reading, Jesus adds:

**“For he who is least among you all will be great.”**

Last? Least? Servant? Where’s the fame? The accolades? The trophies and medals in that? Jesus makes it very easy to understand for the disciples and for us.

**“36 Then He took a little child and set him in the midst of them. And when He had taken him in His arms, He said to them, 37 “Whoever receives one of these little children in My name receives Me; and whoever receives Me, receives not Me but Him who sent Me.”**

Jesus took an insignificant little child and put him in the middle of the disciples for them all to see. And then He did something special. He took up the little child in His loving arms. He served this little child with all His care and attention and love.

Welcome a little child, and you welcome Me. Serve a little child with your time, treasures, talents, love and godly teaching and you are showing greatness. Oh, how children need to know Jesus as their loving Savior! Oh, how children need to be doted on not with material things, but with God’s Word and Sacraments! This is the greatest act of service that one can do, lead a child, lead an adult, lead anyone to know the Good News of Jesus love for all people!

How is that put into action? Well, first of all, this ungodly talk about reproductive freedom and the right to choose to kill a child in the womb must be condemned. Jesus wants us to welcome and receive all children, including those still growing under God’s loving care and direction in the mother’s womb. Does it not take service to place this little life first, before my plans and aspirations? Is not motherhood a great act of servanthood? Indeed it is!

And then when that child is born, a mother and father have the joy of serving the little child with what God offers to all people, a washing of our sins, a washing of

regeneration. Baptism is a loving act of service by parents and godparents. And then, bringing up a child in the Lord to know His Word and then receive the Lord's Supper requires sacrifice of time and self. But it is for the best, so that our children would have Jesus' message sink into their ears, Christ crucified and risen, and be saved by that message!

Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God. And we all must strive to serve all people with the Good News of our Servant Savior Jesus.

Did this message sink into the disciples ears? Not right away, did it? In the next chapter of Mark, chapter 10, we see some non-welcoming disciples. About what?

**“13 Then they brought little children to Him, that He might touch them; but the disciples rebuked those who brought them. 14 But when Jesus saw it, He was greatly displeased and said to them, “Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God. 15 Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it.” 16 And He took them up in His arms, laid His hands on them, and blessed them.”**

And then, a little further in chapter 10, James and John come to Jesus with a request. Do you remember it?

**“35 Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to Him, saying, “Teacher, we want You to do for us whatever we ask.”**

**36 And He said to them, “What do you want Me to do for you?”**

**37 They said to Him, “Grant us that we may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on Your left, in Your glory.”**

In one ear and out the other...Is that not the same with us? How difficult it is to stay focused on the message of Christianity of serving others as we have been first served by Jesus!

With great patience Jesus repeats the message to them and us.” **“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.”**

And then the Great Servant Jesus sums it up in a nutshell for us to remember always in the very next verse.

**“Mark 10:45**

**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 served us with His life so that we would have life. He paid the ransom for all our self-serving, self-absorbed, self-glorifying sins once and for all. And so, we will sing in a few moments:

*But when I think that God, His Son not sparing,  
Sent Him to die, I scarce can take it in—  
That on the cross my burden gladly bearing  
He bled and died to take away my sin; Refrain*

*Then sings my soul, my Savior God, to Thee,  
How great Thou art! How great Thou art!  
Then sings my soul, my Savior God, to Thee,  
How great Thou art! How great Thou art!*

And so when we receive all people in Jesus’ love, we receive Jesus, and God the Father who sent Him for you and me!

Amen.

**“And this peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” Amen. (Philippians 4:7)**