

Who Do You Call Great?
Mark 9:33-37
HUMC September 19, 2021

When I was younger, I used to watch most of Muhammad Ali's boxing matches on black and white television. Not only was Ali the heavy weight champion of the world, but he was charismatic and seemed larger than life. To stir things up, he claimed that he was "The Greatest". He also says that would "float like a butterfly and sting like a bee". Even when he died of Parkinson's disease in 2016, he continued to call himself "The Greatest."

Now when Jesus spoke about greatness, he did it in the context of humble service and childlike faith. Our scripture text which is Mark 9:33-37.

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

³⁵ Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, "Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all."

³⁶ He took a little child whom he placed among them. Taking the child in his arms, he said to them, ³⁷ "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 made a radical statement. He said, "**If anyone wants to be first, they must be last of all and servant of all.**" And to drive the point home, he placed a child in their midst and showed his disciples what greatness was all about.

When I think of greatness, the words that come to mind would be superiority, excellence, distinction and the best.

The images that society might bestow upon as great, would be people like Tom Brady who won 7 Super Bowls. Bill and Melinda Gates who have given billions of dollars to wipe out Malaria and vaccinate African children. Mother Theresa and her work with the dying in Calcutta, India

In some circles, Warren Buffett is seen as the ultimate genius in financial investments. Elvis Presley and Frank Sinatra are considered top singers. Katherine Hepburn, Meryl Streep and Cate Blanchett as superb actresses. Race car drivers like Mario Andretti, Dale Earnhardt, and Richard Petty as three of the best drivers.

Where society values talent, good looks, financial success, and sports championships as the pinnacle of greatness, Jesus sees humble service and a childlike faith as his criteria.

The people that I really admire are not the sports heroes, entertainment stars or financial wizards, but health aides, LPN's and those family members who stay at home and care for the sick.

There was one nurse in the Hillsboro House that I will never forget. I don't even know her name, but while I was visiting a resident, this woman came into give medication. Though the lady I had visited had suffered from anxiety, this nurse was as kind as could be. And just before she left, she kissed the woman on the forehead and was gone. I knew this nurse was a person of faith, but she demonstrated it through her tone of voice and her compassion.

There are two videos that made it around the internet. The first is about a McDonald's employee who helped a disabled man eat his lunch. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4vhdzJZh2-g>

The second video is about Pope Francis early on his pontificate as he hosted a group of Colombian orphans who were seated in the front row at St. Peter's. What you will see in a few minutes is a six year old boy who leaves his seat and gave the pope a hug and wouldn't leave his side. Security guards tried to get the boy off the stage, but that didn't work too well. Let's watch. Most people do not remember what the Pope said, but they will always remember how the Holy Father made the young boy welcome just as Jesus did so long ago. <https://time.com/5465664/boy-interrupts-pope-francis/>

To truly understand what Jesus meant when he used words such as "servant", "last" and "welcoming children" when he refers to greatness. To understand what Jesus was talking about, we need to realize the values in the Kingdom of God are opposites of what we think are so important.

Let me illustrate:

Greatness in the kingdom on **earth** is when we are **first**.

Greatness in the kingdom of **heaven** is when we are **last**.

Greatness in the kingdom on **earth** is when we rise to the **top**.

Greatness in the kingdom of **heaven** is when we are a **servant**.

Greatness in the kingdom of **earth** is when we achieve **rank, position and title**.

Greatness in the kingdom of **heaven** is the **child**.

Greatness in the kingdom on **earth** is when we are **strong, powerful, talented and wealthy**.

Greatness in the kingdom of **heaven** is when we are **helpless, unable to save ourselves, and dependent on the mercy and grace of God.**

This may surprise you, but humble service is a win-win situation. Why? When we serve others, the people we help will benefit and at the same time, we will be rewarded or blessed inwardly.

An example of how that works was the time when Victor Frankl, a medical doctor and prisoner at the Auschwitz Concentration camp during WWII. While incarcerated, Frankl noticed that those who were able to maintain their strength and sanity were the ones who shared what little they had with the other prisoners. They went out of their way to be helpful. It seemed that their physical and mental well-being was strengthened when they focused on something besides themselves.

Which leads me to think. If any of us were to feel depressed or discouraged, a good antidote for our blues is to get out and find someone to visit or do something for others. When we get our minds off ourselves, we will feel better and that all ties into servant hood that Jesus spoke about.

John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist Church put it this way. **“Do all the good you can. By all the means you can. In all the ways you can. In all the places you can. To all the people you can. As long as you ever can”.**

So I would encourage all to cultivate this greatness aspect of the Kingdom of God, but to keep our humble service from becoming a burden, we need to have a childlike faith.

Have you ever noticed, there is something special about the faith of a child? There is an innocence and a simple trust. But we as adults seem to complicate things. When it comes to reaching

children for the kingdom of God. There is this small window of opportunity for them to make a profession of faith and that is when they are young.

As we grow older and become adults, we complicate things. Many of life's experiences can have a negative effect on the simplicity of our faith. One way is to stay fresh in our relationship with God is through personal devotions and regular church worship. When we do that, we maintain a childlike faith, full of wonder and grace.

I had mentioned Mother Teresa earlier and she is a woman synonymous with greatness. She simply believed, "We can do no great things: only small things with great love." Some words are reminiscent of our Lord's immortal words on greatness in v38. "Whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant."

Let me close. The words of Jesus concerning the greatness in the kingdom of God, consists of two parts. One is humble service and the other is childlike faith. May our greatness come from doing good and may we enter the kingdom with childlike faith and serve in every way we can.