

SERMON FOR SEPTEMBER 10, 2023

TEXT: MATTHEW 18: 1

THEME:WHO IS THE GREATEST?

At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"

In the name of Jesus:

Muhammed Ali was a world championship fighter. Ali was a charismatic figure, people were attracted to him, not only because of his prowess in the boxing ring but also because of his personality. He seemingly was bigger than life. Whenever he was in front of the television camera, he would put on a show, usually boasting before the camera saying: "I am the greatest. I said that even before I knew I was. I am the greatest, I figured that if I said it enough, I would convince the world that I was the greatest." Ali said that he was the greatest, over and over again, putting a different spin on his words to reflect the audience he was addressing. In his mind, and in the minds of his fans, he was the greatest boxer who ever lived.

But who, really, is the greatest? It is the question that begs an answer in our text for today. The disciples pose this question to Jesus, "Who is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"

What a loaded question! The question itself reveals a great deal about the disciples, their mindset, and who would be considered great in their eyes.

There was a time when the apostles were arguing who among them would be considered the greatest. The brothers, James and John, made certain that they got out in front of the other apostles and beat them to the punch by asking of Jesus that when He got to His throne in His kingdom, they, James and John, would get the places of honor at Jesus' right and left, thereby showing one and all that they were the greatest of the apostles. Or so they thought.

Not so fast, answered our Lord. Greatest in the kingdom of heaven and greatness in God's eyes is something entirely different from how the world views greatness. In the eyes of the world, like in the mind of Muhammed Ali, greatness is in the eyes of the beholder. The one who is greatest is the one who has the most power, most possessions, has the position of authority, the one who is most popular, or the person who has the most money. The person who has accumulated much of what the world has to offer is the one who is to be considered great in the eyes of man. The mind of man is continually striving after greatness: students seeking to be at the top of the class, awards going to the greatest actors, singers, and entertainers, workers fighting for promotions in the workplace, or sports fans proclaiming of their team that "we are number one", in asking the Lord Jesus the question, "who is greatest in the kingdom of heaven," the answer the Lord gives is opposite of what anyone would expect.

Jesus, in answering the question, points us to a child. Do you desire to become great? To become great you must become a child. Now, children in Jesus' day and age had no rights, so status, no positions of honor or authority. There were little people who were really nobodies. And that is the point that Jesus is making, that greatness in God's sight doesn't come from one's position in the world, or one's possession of the things of the world. Greatness in God's sight is becoming a nobody, to be great you must become the least.

Isn't that exactly what Jesus did? The Apostle Paul tells us to: "Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, **6** who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, **7** but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. **8** And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. **9** Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, **10** so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, **11** and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

Often in Scripture we read of or hear of the phrase, "the mind of Christ." What Paul is speaking of in Philippians 2, is the mind of Christ. Jesus, who is the only begotten Son of the Father, full of grace and truth, who was seated at

the right hand of the Father, came down from heaven to become like us in every way. Jesus became a nobody, born from the Virgin's womb, a child who grew into the full form of a man. Jesus sought no earthly glory or wealth in His life, when tempted by Satan to forgo the trials and tribulations of the cross, Jesus emptied Himself, He poured out His life unto death on the cross, all so that you would become a child of God. He laid aside His glory for a time to humble Himself by dying a death on the cross. Jesus made Himself nothing for His disciples and for you and me. He became weak so that we might be strong in Him.

You have been made His child, you have received a saving faith in Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit in your Baptism. By the power of the Spirit you now have put on Christ, for if anyone is baptized into Christ that person has become a new person, called and empowered by the Lord to live for Jesus. You have been given the mind of Christ, so that you live not for yourself nor do you live for the accomplishments and accolades of the world and those around you. You now live for Christ, and you are now called to imitate Christ in your life. for in Jesus we live, move, and have our being. God the Father has blessed you from on high with the good and gracious gifts of forgiveness, life, hope and salvation.

So getting back to our question, who is the greatest in the kingdom? Of course, the answer is Jesus, He is the Greatest for He is the One who lived, died, rose, and ascended into heaven for you. And He shares His greatness with you, making you His child in the waters of Baptism. Coming to you in this Supper to feed you with His body and blood, for the forgiveness of all of your sins and to strengthen you in faith. So that you can hold onto that forgiveness and also so that you can share His love with others.

Greatness according to God doesn't consist in accomplishments, advancements or personal accolades. To become the greatest, one must become the least. So set your mind on the things of God. Seek His greatness, by believing in Jesus, and by sharing the message of God's love in Jesus for all.

To the glory of God!

In Jesus' Name. Amen