

Pentecost 18B

September 23, 2018

Hymns: 176 - 41 - 468 - 387

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in Christ – among which is the “greatness” that comes through serving in even a small measure as He served! Amen!

Fourth in Series: “Characteristics of Jesus’ Followers.....”

MARK 9:30-37

FOLLOWERS OF JESUS HAVE A SERVANT MENTALITY

Dear fellow servants of Christ / servants of your fellow man,

There is an interesting story that comes out of the Second World War. England and Germany both had state-of-the-art fighter planes. Germany had the **Messerschmitt**, the world’s fastest fighter plane. The British had the **Supermarine Spitfire**. The Spitfire was slower than the Messerschmitt. Nevertheless, German pilots were envious of their British counterparts. You see, the Messerschmitt had been designed to hold the “perfect German.” Who was the perfect German? Who else but *Der Fuhrer*, Adolf Hitler. Hitler was little more than five feet tall. However, most of the German pilots who guided the Messerschmitt were considerably taller than 5 feet. So the Germans had to fly in very cramped quarters. But who was going to tell Adolf Hitler that he was not the perfect German? The

Messerschmitts were faster, but their pilots were handicapped. It is an amazing fact, but many leaders fail because of big egos. Big men in little planes. Big egos in little men. **“Pride goeth before a fall,”** says the ancient adage. And it’s true.

Jesus and the disciples were passing through Galilee. Then they came to Capernaum. It was there that Jesus asked His disciples what they had been arguing about while on the road. The Scripture says His disciples kept quiet. They didn’t want Christ to know that they had been arguing about which of them was the greatest. Surely humans never do that . . . do they? Try to one-up one another? Boast about their accomplishments? Surely you don’t know anybody with a big ego! We read that when the disciples refused to answer Jesus’ question, He sat down. He also probably let out a loud sigh. He called His disciples to gather around and said to them, **“Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all.”**

Interesting words from the Master. If you want to come in first, you’ve got to be willing to come in last and you must be willing to serve. **Let’s begin with the very human desire of wanting to be first.** Many men have big egos. Women have egos too. They’re just a little more subtle about it:

There was a noted priest in Florence in the 15th century. One day he saw an elderly woman worshiping at the statue of the Virgin Mary which stood in his city’s great cathedral. On the following day, he noticed the same woman again on

her knees before the statue. With great interest, the priest observed that day after day, she came and did homage before the statue. "Look how she reverences the Virgin Mother," he whispered to one of his fellow priests. "Don't be deceived by what you see," the second priest responded. "Many years ago an artist was commissioned to create a statue for the cathedral. As he sought a young woman to pose as the model for his sculpture, he found one who seemed to be the perfect subject. She was young, serenely lovely, and had a mystical quality in her face. The image of that young woman inspired his statue of Mary. The woman who now worships the statue is the same one who served as its model years ago. Shortly after the statue was put in place, she began to visit it and continued to worship there religiously ever since."

She had fallen in love with a likeness of herself. You don't have to be a man to have a big ego. All of us are so afflicted, all too often. However, please do not misunderstand. **Having a big ego is not all bad.** People with big egos get things done. People who want to be first, who want to be the greatest, often are doers. Adolf Hitler had a big ego. He was a monster, but he got things done. Given a few breaks here and there, he might have realized his dream to rule the world. The lack of those breaks may well have been determined by God . . . but still Hitler got many things done.

It's very rare to discover a successful person in any field who does not have a healthy degree of their own self-worth. Those who serve Christ need a healthy sense of their own self-worth. Contrary to popular belief, Jesus

doesn't need more wimps. Jesus doesn't need more people whose eyes are always downward because they don't feel worthy. Jesus doesn't need wimps, He needs warriors--people who understand their own value, who have a deep sense of their own self worth, not because they think there's anything special about themselves, but because they understand that their worth is in Christ, Who loved them so much that He – God! – came down into this world and gave Himself for them! Through Spirit-worked faith – not to their credit, but all by the grace of God! – they now are beloved children of the heavenly Father!

Some people put too much emphasis on the meek and mild Jesus. At Christmas time we sing, "O Jesus, so meek! O Jesus, so mild!" But if He were always as meek and mild as a newborn, why in the world would anybody ever crucify Him? If He were that meek and that mild, would He have driven the money changers and merchants from the temple? Jesus came to be servant to all, but He wasn't a wimp. Jesus sought to serve the haughty Pharisees by calling a spade a spade. He didn't back off from labeling them the hypocrites they were – white-washed sepulchres! I think it's interesting that when the Sanhedrin ordered Jesus to be arrested that night in the Garden of Gethsemane, they sent a whole brigade of soldiers. They didn't regard Him as a wimp. They regarded Him as a dangerous person. Somehow, little did they know how dangerous Jesus could be. He gave them a taste of it when, without as much as laying a hand on them, He set them back on the seat of their pants as they closed in on Him!

And then, Jesus blew it all by meekly submitting to their arrest?! Hardly! He was manly and brave enough to face ultimate abuse and the cross for us and for our sins! In His own way, Jesus was a warrior. He was a warrior intent on storming the very gates of hell. He was a strong man in every sense and He wants His followers to be strong. Face it – life is difficult! It is even more demanding for the Christian, who seeks to serve the Lord and his fellowman with the time, talents, and treasure God has given. Jesus wants followers who will set an example for other people in how to live victoriously. He wants followers who are up to the rigors of facing the evils of this world and for calling and preparing souls in this world for the day of Judgment. So He said to His disciples, ***"Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all."***

In other words, Jesus doesn't ask us to give up our strong egos. Rather He wants us to discipline those egos to serve Him and to serve all those for whom He died. Jesus didn't scold His disciples for having great dreams, for wanting to be the best, the greatest. Ambition can be a very useful tool for motivating us to be all we can be. Christ wanted His disciples to understand that being greatest in the kingdom of God meant a total commitment to serving Him and every person their lives touched.

It is interesting that while they were still trying to digest this teaching, Jesus took a little child and placed that child before them. Taking the child into His arms, He said to them, ***"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."***

Serving Christ is helping the least and the smallest as if they were Jesus and the Father Himself. This means placing oneself under all others, to serve them with the Gospel in the hope of them becoming and/or remaining children of God themselves. Jesus died for the lowest of humanity, didn't He?! It means placing oneself in the service of the lowest of sinners, as Jesus did when He went to the cross – AND to do so in the spirit of God's great servant, the Apostle Paul, who claimed for himself the title "Chief of Sinners!" This is greatness: in the manner, if not the equivalent, of Jesus, Who served us all by becoming sin for us! **If you want to be the greatest, commit your life to serving the least and the lowest.**

When our lives have been joined to Christ, when we are baptized, when we acknowledge that Jesus Christ is the Lord of our lives, that is not the end of the process. It is only the beginning. By the power of the Holy Spirit, we are to continue to grow into the spiritual image of Christ. That doesn't mean that we will ever become perfect in this life, but it does mean we will continue to grow in love, to grow in compassion, to grow in our ability to forgive and accept others. You may think pretty highly of yourself as a Christian, but if you are not a more loving, more accepting, more compassionate person than you were when you first began your Christian journey, you are still stuck on first base.

Saving faith is only the beginning of the journey. Growing to be more like Jesus is the continuation of the process. And the crowning achievement, what makes you the greatest, is humbling yourself to serve those who are less

fortunate, those who do not have the advantages that you and I have, those who do not know God's amazing grace. Collectively, it means Emmanuel congregation coming to grips with the reality that this humble little gathering of saints can accomplish great things for the Lord. Indeed, you already have!: Infants turned from heathen to saints through Holy Baptism. Through the power of faith you receive the very body and blood of Christ in bread and wine twice a month in worship. The Word of God preached and taught converts hearts and grows the seed of faith into mature trust in the one true Triune God.

Now comes the question, "Can this little flock afford a full time pastor?" It's not so much how big we are, but if we can humbly grasp a servant attitude that seizes the moment and says, "Yes, we can! And we will!" Along with your leaders, I am confident it can be done. May our Lord move your hearts to serve one another and this community with a full time pastor leading you!

Big men in little planes. Why were they in those little planes? Because of a big ego in a little man. God wants us to stand tall by humbling ourselves as He humbled Himself and giving our lives as He gave His life to save and to serve the world. If you want to be No. 1, if you want to be the greatest, that is the blueprint. The only ones among us who will be really happy are those who have sought and found how to serve. And doesn't that sound "great?!" Amen!

May He Who began a good work in you carry it on to completion until the day of Jesus Christ! Amen!