

Rev. Shaun Arndt  
Peace, Sun Prairie  
October 21, 2018

**Mark 10:35-45**  
***“What makes you great?”***

How great is the love the Father has  
Lavished on us, that we should be called children  
of God! Amen

*Dear Friends in Christ,*

Greatness is important to most people. People argue over whose team is greatest. Lists are made of the greatest actors, musicians and leaders. People want to get into the Guinness book of world records filled all kind of greats. Magazine articles and You Tube tell you to be great at what you do.

But only our Great God and Savior can teach us about true and lasting greatness. So let us listen to Gospel reading where the Holy Spirit answers:  
**What makes you great?**

The world says to be great you need to be number one, the best, the most important.

That seems to be the definition James and John had in mind when they asked Jesus:

**“Promise that we may sit, one at your right and one at your left, in your glory.”**

Like so many others, the two brothers still thought Jesus would set up an earthly kingdom. Just like the best man and the maid of honor sit right next to the bride and groom in seats of honor at a wedding, so to sit next to the king was the greatest spot. James and John wanted to be number 1 and number 2 in Jesus’ Kingdom when it came to honor and power.

Given what Jesus has to say, the other ten apostles were **angry** because they wanted those spots for themselves!

The world often views greatness in terms of power and riches. Think how many powerful rulers and conquerors are remembered by History: like Alexander the *Great*, Peter the *Great*.

This is what Jesus is talking about when He says: **“You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them.** To the world great means having power and status and using it for your own advantage.

**So what makes you great? The world’s answer** is to be the best and have the most. It’s how high you can climb up the ladder and how much glory, power, money and fame you can get. **The world’s answer** is really what is **great for me.**

But Jesus tells us this is **not** God’s idea of greatness. For Jesus did not come to set up a kingdom on earth with power and glory for himself and his followers in this sinful world. Instead he says: **“You do not know what you are asking. Can you drink the cup that I am going to drink or be baptized with the baptism that I am going to be baptized with?”**

**Drink the cup** is Old Testament picture language for suffering. The book of Isaiah talks about this as the **cup of the (LORD's) wrath**. This is the same cup of suffering Jesus spoke of when he was arrested in Gethsemane: **Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me.**

Jesus makes the same point as he speaks about a “**baptism**”. **Baptize** is the Greek word to apply water by pouring, sprinkling or being plunged into it. In this context, Jesus speaks about how suffering would be poured over him as he would be beaten, whipped, crowned with thorns and crucified. Christ was going to be plunged into God's judgment on the cross and sink into death's icy river.

Jesus could not be more clear that his **kingdom is not of this world**. For Jesus, the King of kings, who is indeed Greatest will suffer and die! By saying James and John would also share in his cup and baptism, Jesus reminds us how Christians will bear a cross, often facing trouble, difficulty and hardship as they follow Jesus in a sin wrecked world.

You see God works with a totally different definition of greatness than sinful human beings. Jesus says: **Whoever wants to be great among you will be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you will be a slave of all.**

The world says you're great if people pay attention to you and *serve you*. But Jesus turns self-serving ideas of greatness upside down. What makes a person great in God's eyes is serving others, doing what is best for them. It's about giving help and attention to others, about how many people I can serve.

A **slave** is a person who does what someone else wants. To be great in God's kingdom, means putting what God says is best above what sinful self wants. God's idea of greatness is changing the selfish question of '*what's in it for me*' to '*what is the best can I do for you?*' **So what makes you great?** Jesus' answer is serving, doing what is **great** for others.

But c'mon! Who would actually act like this? Who would actually be willing to always put what others need most ahead of self? Who would become a slave to do what was great for others?

Only the very greatest One all: Jesus! **For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve.** True eternal God who became human, Jesus was not born in a golden palace **to be served**, but came humble and lowly, placed in a manger, come to serve us! To do what was best for us, He went all the way up to Jerusalem fully aware of pain and death it would take to save us!

*Serving* others is God's answer to **what makes you great.** So now we need to ask ourselves: how great have we been? To be honest... not so great. Even though God has made us His people and given us hearts of faith eager to live for our Savior, yet inside of us there is still that old naturally sinful heart that would rather have others serve me, than ask *how can I serve.*

Did you even experience what I do as we listen to Jesus calling us to sacrifice self to serve, that it's hard to listen to, because that old sinful part of us just constantly wants to object and protest this message?

The same sinful part of us that makes itself known as we so naturally think: What's in it for me? What will I get out of it? What will others think of me? How convenient will it be to serve? How much will it *cost* me? Be a **slave** to what God says is best for us and others, and our old sinful reason wants to shout: "*Are you crazy?!*"

Or it happens this way. You start out working hard and serving out of thanks for Christ, but suddenly you catch yourself thinking, '*who will see how hard I'm working and notice what great servant I am?*' And none of this is greatness. It's ugly sin. And great is the punishment in hell it has earned us.

So thank God our eternal future is not based on our spotty service, but on the only perfectly great Servant: Jesus Christ! Jesus is not just the perfect

example of great service, but He is the One who rescues us from our shameful selfishness.

Listen again to His words: **For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”**

As true God, Jesus had every right to rule in glory and demand that people serve him. Instead, He bent low and stooped himself under the commandments of God we've broken, to serve us by keeping them in our place. He perfectly loved and served others, putting their needs before his own. He to whom the holy angels bow down even bent His knees to wash his disciples' stinky feet, the job of a **slave!**

To save us from hell's agony we deserved, Jesus became the **servant** who on the cross drank down every drop of the cup of suffering our self-serving desires earned. Giving up His precious life, Jesus paid the only ransom price that sets us free forever.

All Jesus did from His lowly birth, to His innocent death to His victory over the grave, all this Jesus did to save us and to serve us with the greatest of gifts: forgiveness and peace with God for time without end.

Now we will experience greater joy and happiness than we could ever imagine in God's eternal home where no selfishness, no sorrow, no disappointment will ever take away from the bliss of that heavenly life with God! What could be **greater?!**

The perfect and eternal life we have a gift from Jesus makes the whole idea of needing to push others around and push ourselves forward as **great** is just plain silly. For Jesus had already made you **greater** than we can imagine, by sharing His love and eternal glory with us!

See how this gives us every reason and power to imitate our Savior by putting others first. No how matter how much we may give up when we put others first, we will lose nothing, for Jesus already gives us everything and more in that

heavenly home his life and death has prepared for you!

**What makes you great?** The better question is: **Who makes you great?** And the Answer is Jesus. His saving love has made you one of God's **great** people. His saving love gives us the greatest reason to serve. Amen.

*May your unfailing love rest upon us, O LORD, even as we put our hope in you. Amen.*