

“From the Least to the Greatest”

Text: Mark 9:33-37

The red carpet is one mark of rank and prestige in the world. The red carpet treatment is synonymous with the high and mighty. It is symbolic of the power they hold and their recognition for power. If I were to say lets give this person the “red carpet treatment” you would know what I meant.

At various award shows, there is an actual red carpet. What happens on that carpet during awards or premiers is duly noted. Those who enter upon the carpet are the rich and famous of the world. At last Sunday’s awards show such a display was in evidence as one noted performer interrupted the acceptance speech of an award winner in preference of who he thought should have won the award. He spent the next several days apologizing for his outburst due to the public outcry.

We have become very familiar with those in sports, entertainment or politics who tell us how wonderful they are. Humility seems to be a long forgotten quality. At one time someone accused Abraham Lincoln of being “two-faced”. He responded, “If I had two faces, do you think this is the one I would be sharing?”

As Christians we are not called to power and prestige. Jesus tells us in our text: “If anyone would be first, he must be last and servant of all.” Personal power is not the way of his followers and it certainly is not the way he showed with his own life given for us. We are called to humble service trusting God’s strength as he displayed in the life of our Savior and the way he accomplishes his good-

FROM THE LEAST TO THE GREATEST

I. The world's greatness comes from power

II. The greatness Jesus taught was about humility

I.

A.1. As time was winding down the disciples were learning much about Jesus. They had seen him transfigured before their very eyes. They saw his full glory as the Son of God along with Moses and Elijah. Even though they followed him and carried out his mission, they still had much to learn as last Sunday's gospel lesson pointed out.

Now it was time for some teaching and in verse 31 Jesus tells them what is mission will mean for him and them as well. "The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him. And when he is killed, after three days he will rise." In the previous chapter of Mark's gospel he told them that as well and St. Peter rebuked him. (Mark 8:32) There is none of that this time.

2. This time they remained quiet. They really didn't understand what Jesus was saying and rather than appear foolish they remained quiet and confused. This is God's plan for our salvation however. St. Paul said: "For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God."

(I Corinthians 1:18)

This is certainly not the way of worldly power. We live in the world and cannot remove ourselves from it, but our way of living is the way of Christ and not the way of the world as the disciples were soon to learn. It is a good lesson for us today as well.

B.1. Any number of times in the gospels there had been a power struggle among the disciples. We have them too. We want to be recognized for our work. We can become too impressed with our abilities and efforts and wish that

others would work as we do. Such an instance occurs later in chapter 10 of this gospel as well as Matthew 20:20ff. On one occasion James and John want seats of honor and on another their mother asks a favor of Jesus. His answer to them on those occasions is the same as it is in our text.

We may be tempted to engage in power struggles, but that is the way of the world. Really, the way of Jesus is much more comfortable and less stressful. It is that way because we have been renewed by Jesus.

2. Without a word from the disciples, Jesus knew what their arguing was about. They were arguing about who was the greatest, and as usual, Jesus has an answer for their dilemma. “If anyone would be first, he must be last and servant of all.” In the Gospel of St. Matthew Jesus says by way of comparison: “Even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” (Matthew 20:28) The way that Jesus calls us to serve is in his footsteps.

II.

A.1. Because of the world’s view of the cross, it is clear that this is not the way of the world. What Jesus calls us to is humility. It is only by God’s grace that we are saved because of what Jesus has done. He showed the greatest humility of all as he went to the cross. St. Paul says in Philippians: “But made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on the cross.” (Philippians 2:7-8)

Martin Luther’s Small Catechism uses this verse to describe the state of humiliation of our Savior. It says that as man he did not always fully use his divine power. He had it at his disposal, but that during this time would not have accomplished our salvation.

Even though the disciples were a bit confused, this was God’s plan and the death of Jesus for our sins was

necessary. His resurrection was as well, so that we could have life forever.

2. In order to visualize what is least among us, Jesus brought a child and took the child in his arms. Children are smaller, weaker, and not as knowledgeable as adults. In that sense they are the least. Jesus is identifying with this child. In the eyes of the world he is least, yet the greatest as God's own Son.

B.1. When that is our attitude, we receive all that Jesus has accomplished for us. He humbled himself unto death for our sins and has made full payment for our sins. It is the only way that this could be accomplished. Sin entered the world through the sin of Adam and Eve. In God's justice payment needed to be made by a man, Jesus Christ.

There are those who believe that they can make up the difference with God by living a good life. The problem is that none of us are that good. We will always fail at meeting God's standard of perfection. Only one man could meet it and that is Jesus.

2. On the cross Jesus was ridiculed, mocked and spit upon. In short Jesus was seen as nothing to those around him. The passage referred to earlier says that Jesus was exalted and that "That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father." (Philippians 2:10-11)

Jesus' way was the way of humility and service. We too can follow that example both in this congregation and in this community. Jesus calls us to follow in his way. What we do may not be all that notable, but when done in service to him it has a great effect because his blessing is upon it. Our faith is based upon the redeeming work of our Savior and responds in thanks for the greatest service of all. Amen.