

Sunday: October 18, 2009

Scripture: Mark 10:35-45

Title: “Being the Greatest”

The Message of Scripture (Sermon Thesis): We can serve others from right where we are – no matter where we are located.

The Sharing of the Good News (The Sermon Purpose): Everyone helping everyone will be the world God is creating and that is a great world filled with the greatest news.

(Remember, it’s all about God!)

Two men were talking at a party. They got to telling stories, each story more exaggerated and long winded than the last. Finally, one of the men said, “Well I will tell you this, my ancestry goes all the back to William the Conqueror.” Looking at the second man, the first man asked with a whole bunch of superiority, “How far back does your family go back?” The second man replied, “I really don’t know. Our family records never made it on the Ark” (Flynn).

Humans love to stand out and be recognized – Andy Warhol once commented that everyone will get 15 minutes of fame in their lives – but most of us long for more. In this day and age, it’s fairly easy to get recognition; just make a funny YouTube video and if it goes viral, you may find yourself on CNN or the Today Show being recognized. When you float a balloon over Colorado, you will get recognized.

The sons of Zebedee are no different. James and John, lifted up in this morning’s reading from Mark, have left their careers to follow Jesus and they

believe they have hitched their wagon to a star. This was Jesus – the man who would restore peace to Israel and defeat the Romans so they thought. They see their chance to be somebody – to rule with Jesus and bask in earthly glory. Comedienne Lily Tomlin said, “I always wanted to be somebody. Now I realize I should have been more specific.”

James and John could identify. Jesus tells them they can certainly be somebody in his world, but if they get their wish they might not like the specifics. It won't be a life of comfort and fame – but life of discomfort and infamy. A life far from glory will likely be theirs if they choose to continue following Jesus, because he wasn't the next big thing. He was the big thing to end all big things. That would bring earthly scorn; not earthly fame.

Jesus tells James and John this. He tells them they'll have to drink from the same cup he will drink from – but they don't seem to fully understand what Jesus is saying. It doesn't seem to sink in. They're blinded by their ambition to share power with him.

We're all like James and John – we want the world's adulation, and to get it we'll do just about anything. The world recognizes greatness – it gives medals, awards, world records, and money to what society defines as success. And that recognition can be good. But sometimes we get caught up in seeking the worldly success of power, wealth, fame, and beauty. The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. calls that the “drum major instinct” – we want to be out in front, leading the parade, and being recognized for our skills and talents.

Jesus knew that earthly glory is fleeting and the masses can be fickle. Fame can turn to infamy in the blink of an eye, just as it did for him after Palm Sunday. A story is told of Winston Churchill who, after giving a speech in front of 10,000 people was asked by a friend, “Winston, aren’t you impressed that 10,000 people came to hear you speak?” Churchill replied, “Not really. One hundred thousand would come to see me hang.”

Instead of seeking the world’s glory, Jesus gives us a new definition of greatness – and it’s interesting to look at the words he chose to use. He tells James and John, if you really want to be great – become a *diakonos* – a minister. If we desire greatness we will minister to people. Ministers want what’s best for other people and strive to give it to them. But, Jesus isn’t finished. If you desire more and want to be the greatest – become a *doulos* – a slave. Slaves act differently than ministers. Ministers have their own free will. They can choose whether they serve people or not. Slaves, on the other hand, give themselves totally to the will of another – no questions asked. Ministering to one another is great, Jesus said, but putting ourselves under the will of all we meet – serving them without hesitation or resentment is how we become the greatest.

Upon hearing this definition, we may rightly recoil. After all, being a slave is something we are staunchly against in our society. We, as a society, fought mightily to end the practice of slavery – of submitting our will to the total power of another. We know that in the world the practice of slavery results in the abuse of human beings. Jesus came and made himself a slave to all and in the end it got him killed.

But, this is the call Jesus issues to us – to serve everyone, without exception. We are called to serve even if we are shunned, even if we are disrespected, even if we are killed. We are called beyond our selfishness, beyond our very human yearning for being recognized with all the fame, wealth, skill, and beauty (Chellew-Hodge) that we imagine might come with worldly recognition. We are called to serve from wherever we are in life.

We know about that service here at Immanuel; Service offered through the Food 4 Kids program and Open Door. We know about service with twenty ministries listed in our bulletin and on our website that we support. On this Sunday when we highlight the Blue Ribbon community efforts to make Sedalia a better place to live, work, and visit, we are mindful of service that is offered and can be offered. Of course, thinking about services yet to be offered is our ongoing quest. What is a need that should be addressed and what position are we in to address the need?

Seven-year-old Isabelle Redford recognized a need. She has always liked to draw throughout her few years, but her art is more than just kid stuff. “I kind of always drew because I loved to draw as I grew up,” Isabelle said. “And I just was an artist.” Her drawings are good enough to earn some real money but she isn’t spending it on toys or candy. “I like to draw cards because I can raise money to help the orphans and help them have a home to live in,” Isabelle said.

According to ABC news, helping orphans has become Isabelle’s cause. It started two years ago when she was 5. Her mom, Kelly, and they live in Parsons, Kan., told Isabelle a story about twin girls in Haiti whose mother died during childbirth. “She immediately looked at me and said, ‘What can we do, we have to help,’” her mother said. Isabelle said, “I brainstormed and I thought of a way to help them. ... I thought of cards because I love to draw.”

Isabelle started by selling cards at garage sales and to her friends and family. Her sales took off and, now the cards are sold through the Global Orphan Project

in Kansas City, a charity that builds and runs orphanages around the world. So far, Isabelle has earned more than \$10,000 -- half of that was enough to build an orphanage in Haiti, where she visited last month. "It was the first night we were there and ... I saw the girls and, as I came to where my house was, they were chanting my name, and I thought that was really amazing," she said.

Isabelle spent two nights with her new friends at the Isabelle Redford House of Hope. "I also loved the girls in my house," she said. "I was glad that six girls had a place to live. We were just friends immediately and I, we didn't have to speak the same language. We just were having fun and we laughed and played a lot."

One orphanage is not enough for Isabelle. She continues selling her artwork and collecting money to put toward her next project. Her mother said, "I thought we'd get to \$5,000 and then she'll feel like she's accomplished something and she'll be done. We got to \$5,000 and the amount of money that she received was actually more than she needed. ... And she quickly said, 'Well, no Mom, this is a perfect amount for the start of my second home.'" The Global Orphan Project is about to break ground on another Isabelle Redford house -- this one in Malawi, Africa. "I really want to do this all over the world where they really need it," Isabelle said (ABC News).

A seven year old girl from Parsons, KS helps others around the world. She joins a group that has poured themselves out and serves others. Mahatma Gandhi and Archbishop Oscar Romero come to mind. And while they are known throughout the world, it was the service to others they sought -- not fame and attention. We know about them and admire them today for what they did in the world and we wish more would emerge like them. But unless we are willing, as Gandhi said, "to be the change we wish to see," all those examples of becoming a *doulos* in this world will only be something we hope for. As humans we readily admire the actions and the words, but we don't want the fate. Like James and John, we are ready to sit in glory with God but not so ready to be fondly remembered as selfless martyrs.

This is another hard teaching that Jesus gives us today and like last week this teaching can leave us wondering just what it is we can do. Well, we can at least aspire to be great -- that is to be ministers to the hurt and broken in our world. First though we must once more put aside our ideas of worldly greatness and reach out to touch "the least of these." Archbishop Romero said, "How beautiful the

day when all baptized understand that their work, their job, is priestly work that just as I celebrate Mass at the altar so each carpenter . . . each metal worker, each professional, each doctor with the scalpel, the market woman at her stand, are performing a priestly office (Leshner). Yes, reaching out to serve with God's love and mercy, wherever we are, is the greatest we can do and when we do, when we all do that, the result will be the world at its greatest. The result will be the world God is creating. That will be a world filled with the greatest news. Let us pray for that world.

Lord,

You call us to serve. The ways that we can serve are endless. Bless our efforts to discern what we can do to help bring about the world that you are creating. With a special word of thanks for Isabelle Redford and all who serve others from wherever they are, we pray this day in your name, Amen.

Offering: The money we give does make a difference in the world. The ministries listed this morning are always in need of prayer and donations. Feel free at anytime to give to these organizations. Just make your check to Immanuel and mark it according to where you want the money to go.

Dedication: Lord, You are the giver of all good things. We ask that you accept and bless this portion of the many blessings you have bestowed upon us. Magnify and multiply these gifts for your glory in the world. Amen.

Benediction: Go forth from this place blessed by God and sharing God's greatness in the world. Serving others in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, go forth. Amen and Amen.

Sources:

ABC News; "Person of the Week"; Fall 2009; ABCNews.com

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Leshner, A. Jean; *Prayers for the Common Good*; The Pilgrim Press: Cleveland, OH; 1998.