

## Mark 9:30-37

Where there is a winning team, there must, of necessity, be a team that loses. This is the way of life in the world. There is a struggle for power, for greatness. When Muhammad Ali was going around saying, "I am the greatest!" with those very words he was saying to everyone else: "You're not!"

This struggle for power and greatness exists in the world, but does it have a place in the church? Jesus' disciples thought so. As they were following Jesus on the road to Capernaum, they were arguing among themselves who was the greatest. What if we were to do this here? Suppose we had a ranking system to determine which of our church members is the greatest? Is there anything good at all that could come from that? No! Nothing! It would be pure evil and wickedness, for it would come not from God, but from the devil.

Satan is all about power, about grabbing greatness for himself. This is what caused his fall from heaven in the first place. This is what caused him to tempt Adam and Eve to sin against God. There is a limited amount of power in the world. In order to gain more power, someone else must give up some of their power. "*Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory*" we say in the Lord's Prayer. All power belongs to God. He is greater than all. Satan strikes against God's power by tempting His dear children in Christ to sin and fall from grace so he can claim them for himself. He opposes the power and greatness of God in this way. And when we in Jesus' church assert power and greatness over others, it is Satan, and not God, who is at work in us.

It might seem to us like harmless fun that Jesus' disciples were arguing about who was the greatest. "It was just a little competition," we might say, "and competition helps us to improve." But in claiming to be great, each one of the disciples was declaring by these words that the others were not as great. This is the mind of sin. Sexual sin is nothing less than grabbing power over someone else; saying to that person that they are of less value, of less worth; saying, "I am entitled to take from you whatever I want, for I am greater than you." Sinful pride is nothing less than grabbing honor over someone else, declaring by such an attitude that others are of less importance.

For one of us to be the greatest, all of the rest of us must fall in place under that one. Why do we need to be great? Why did Jesus' disciples want to be the greatest? Is it not enough for us that Jesus is greater than all? When we desire power and greatness, we are trying to be like God. We are acting like Satan in trying to rob God of what belongs to Him.

God assigns greatness not to individual people, but to works done in love for Him. Jesus stood a child before His disciples and, taking him up in His arms said, "*Whoever receives one such child in My name receives Me.*" If you want to see greatness, look no further than at what Dan and Abby did for Hannah this morning. They brought her to the arms of Jesus by bringing her to Holy Baptism. Not too great in the eyes of the world. But Jesus says there is nothing greater. Who are the greatest missionaries? Christian parents who raise their children in the fear and love of the Lord. Who are the greatest disciples of Jesus? All who love the Lord by placing themselves, not over, but under others to serve them.

This is why Jesus is so great. He is not the greatest because He is God. He is greater than all because He placed Himself beneath everyone else and became a servant to all through His sufferings and death on the cross.

Jesus had all power, but He let go of all of it. He could have crushed that army of soldiers that came against Him with His little finger. But He, of whom we say, "*Thine is the power,*" became weak for our sake. He gave up His honor, His glory, His power. He gave up His very life to die the death of a criminal. He did this for you. Not to make you say that He is so great, but to win for you a place with Him in heaven.

Jesus gave up His greatness because we are always trying to grab greatness. Jesus relinquished His power because you and I are always taking power from others. He did all this to become the One crucified in our place. Jesus took the lowest seat of all -- the seat in hell, to be punished severely for our lust for power, for our sinful desire to be great.

If He had not taken that seat, you and I would be condemned to have that seat in hell for all eternity. But He did. It is done. And Jesus is not sorry that He did it for you. He did it out of love. He counted it all joy to serve you in this way. Because now you stand in the eyes of God without guilt, with no one to condemn you, for you are forgiven--completely forgiven. Your lust for power over others in the past; your desire to be great by counting yourself better than others, it is all forgiven by your gracious God for the sake of Jesus.

So, believing this, how will we live? We certainly will not be the "Muhammad Ali's" in the church: "I am the greatest disciple of Jesus!" And why should we be? We do not need to strive for greatness because God has already raised us up in Christ "*and seated us with Him in the heavenly places.*" When you do something great, it is Christ doing it through you, just as every good work you do is not done by your own power, but is done in the power of the Holy Spirit. So, yes, go and do great things. Not to be great, but because He who is great lives within you. Amen.