

INI - SDG

6th Sunday of Easter

May 17, 2009

Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, Hecla

Zion Lutheran Church, Ipswich

Redeemer Lutheran Church, Bowdle

Text: Matthew 20:17-28 - *Now as Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, He took the twelve disciples aside and said to them, "We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn Him to death and will turn Him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the third day He will be raised to life!"*

Then the mother of Zebedee's sons came to Jesus with her sons and, kneeling down, asked a favor of Him.

"What is it you want?" He asked.

She said, "Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at Your right and the other at Your left in Your kingdom."

"You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said to them. "Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?"

"We can," they answered.

Jesus said to them, "You will indeed drink from My cup, but to sit at My right or left is not for Me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared by My Father."

When the ten heard about this, they were indignant with the two brothers. Jesus called them together and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave – just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many."

Theme: **GREATNESS IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD**

- Different than the world
- Seen in the Son of Man
- Reflected in us

Dear fellow ransomed by the servant of the LORD, Jesus Christ,

What makes a “great” congregation? Maybe a question you’ve never thought of before, but is Prince of Peace / Zion / Redeemer Lutheran Church a “great” congregation? The world judges greatness by numbers. The greatest athletes have the highest batting average, most touchdowns, fastest speed. This is true also when the world gauges looks at different churches. When someone is looking for a new church to attend, they don’t usually start with doctrine. Usually it’s the biggest building or the largest attendance. 60 Minutes would never interview a pastor from one of our churches because we are so small and insignificant. However 60 Minutes has interviewed pastors from some of our nation’s mega-churches, because they have thousands of people attend their services and they worship in huge facilities. The world judges greatness by

numbers.

In our text today we find a much different definition of greatness. As with most things in the world, greatness in God's Kingdom is much different than that of the world. In fact we'll see that it is almost the exact opposite. Greatness in God's Kingdom is achieved differently than in the kingdom of this world. Greatness in God's Kingdom was clearly demonstrated in the Son of Man, our Savior, Jesus Christ. As Jesus shows us what greatness is, even so may we reflect that greatness in our lives. May God the Holy Spirit bless us by His holy Word!

DIFFERENT THAN THE WORLD

In our text we find Jesus and His disciples headed to Jerusalem in the weeks leading up to His death on the cross. Jesus takes this opportunity to prepare His disciples for what is about to take place in Jerusalem. He shows Himself to be Son of God as He knows exactly is going to happen to Him in Jerusalem. Jesus was going to Jerusalem to die for the sins of the world. ***"We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and the teachers of the law."*** Jesus is very specific about what is going to take place on Good Friday. He knows and He wants His disciples to know. He is going to be betrayed by Judas into the hands of His enemies, the Jewish religious leaders.

Jesus continues to prepare His disciples with the details of His trial and death. ***"They will condemn Him to death and will turn Him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified."*** Notice the details Jesus gives. He knows exactly what is in store for Him. He knows how He will be mocked by the Roman soldiers. He knows He will be blasphemed. He knows that He will be flogged or whipped. He knows that He will have nails driven into His hands and feet as He is crucified. And knowing all this do we see Jesus running away from Jerusalem? Not at all. He presses forward!

So would the world view Jesus to be great as He goes forward to Jerusalem? Would they look upon the mocked, flogged, and crucified Jesus - the bloodied and bruised Jesus and say, "There is a great Man!" That is not the sign of greatness - what Jesus did was a sign of weakness! Jesus does not look like the world champion standing in the ring, Jesus looks like a defeated opponent!

The unbelieving world showed their contempt for Jesus as He hung on the cross. We are told in the Gospels that those who passed by the cross wagged their heads at Him and blasphemed Him. They mocked Him saying, ***"You who destroy the temple and build it in three days, save Yourself! It You are the Son of God, come down from the cross."*** (Matt 27:40) Greatness in their eyes would have been for Jesus to save Himself and come down from the cross!

Returning to our text Jesus defines perfectly greatness in this world. ***"You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them."*** For the unbelieving world, greatness must be demonstrated. Superiors need to lord their authority over those under them. Great men need to shout from the boxing ring or from the end zone, "I am the greatest of all time!" To the world, for one to be great he must display his greatness for all to see. This is why nations have military reviews - for the world to see how great and powerful their military might is. The world views greatness in displays of might.

The disciples thought of greatness in the same way. That is why James and John's mother wanted her two boys to sit at Jesus' right and left hand in His kingdom. These were positions of power and authority that she requested for her sons. This is also why the other 10

disciples became indignant or angry with James and John. They thought they deserved positions of greatness

SEEN IN THE SON OF MAN

Greatness in the Kingdom of God is the most clearly seen in what the Son of Man did. When the world saw Jesus nailed to the cross they only saw a weak and defeated man, bleeding and dying. But we know that there on that cross is the Son of Man, the promised Savior of the world. There on that cross is the Son of God. His greatness is not seen in Him coming down from the cross, His greatness is that He stayed on the cross!

Jesus clearly declares, ***“The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”*** This statement of Jesus tells us everything we need to know about greatness in God’s Kingdom. Here is the Son of Man, the Messiah, the Christ - God’s Anointed. Does God’s Anointed One cry out like a spoiled brat that everyone listen to Him and obey Him? Does the Son of Man demand that man wait hand and foot on Him? After all this is the Word made flesh, this is true God become man. He created the world and all that is in it. He created man. Man should rightly serve Him on hand and foot! And yet Jesus demanded none of these things for Himself. He did not come to be served, but to serve. And His serving is most clearly seen in His death on the cross.

We heard in our New Testament lesson, Paul going into depth on the greatness seen in the Son of Man. Paul writes to Philippians how Jesus was true God, but He was willing to take on the form of a servant. He became Man to serve man and God. His service went so far as to die that humiliating death on the cursed cross to save man. That is greatness in the Kingdom of God. Jesus having humbled Himself, did not exalt Himself, but it was the Father who exalted His Son. ***Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*** (Phil 2:9-11) Because the Son of God took on the form of a servant, God exalted this most humble Servant above all else. Now those who mocked and blasphemed will bow in fear at the very name of God’s exalted Servant.

The greatness of Jesus is seen in His service. Though Lord of all, Jesus humbled Himself beneath all. He died for all. Jesus gave His holy, precious, blood as the ransom payment for us all. We have been purchased and won from all sin, death, and the power of the devil by His death on the cross. God exalted His Servant by raising Him to life on the third day. Greatness in the Kingdom of God is clearly seen in the Son of Man, Jesus Christ.

REFLECTED IN OUR LIVES

To the world greatness is like a pyramid. Everyone wants to be at the top of the pyramid. So to achieve such greatness you must climb over the lesser man. But Jesus says to His followers, ***“Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave – just as the Son of Man.”*** In the Kingdom of God the pyramid of greatness is turned on its head. As one Lutheran theologian put it: “The great man [is] not sitting atop the lesser men, but the great man [is] bearing the lesser man on his back.”

There has been no greater man to walk this earth than Jesus, the Son of God. Yet in His greatness He bore the sins of the world. All our wretchedness, all our filth, all our guilt, and all

our condemnation Jesus Himself took on Himself. He suffered for our sin. He bore our sorrow. The chastisement for our peace was upon Him. The result, Isaiah writes, **“by His stripes we are healed.”** (Isaiah 53:5) Jesus endured all this to heal us. Jesus served us by offering His life as a ransom for us all.

This greatness of our Savior ought to be reflected in we who have been saved. Jesus uses some Hebrew parallelism to emphasize His point. **“Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant.”** And **“Whoever wants to be first must be your slave.”** Do you want to be great? Do you want to be first? Look to Jesus see how your Savior served you. He gave Himself to ransom you. Greatness in the Kingdom of God reflects that of the Lord. Being a servant, being a slave to others is greatness. **“Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus,”** Paul writes to the Philippians (2:5). Greatness in the Kingdom of God is not “me” first, it is loving one another as Jesus loved us and gave Himself for us. (Gal 2:20) Greatness is the Christian **in lowliness of mind...esteem(ing) others better than himself.** (Phil 2:3)

A great congregation is not measured by bodies in the pews or money in the bank account. Greatness in the Kingdom of God was clearly demonstrated by His Son Jesus Christ. The Son of man came to serve and give His life as a ransom for many. Jesus served us by offering His life to save our souls. May we reflect the greatness of Jesus by serving one another as we have been served. Becoming a slave of all out of love for Jesus, that is greatness in the Church! AMEN