

HE IS RISEN! HALLELUJAH!

The Sunday after Easter
April 11, 2010
Prince of Peace Lutheran Church
Hecla, SD

Text: Matthew 12:38-41 *Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered, saying, "Teacher, we want to see a sign from You." But He answered and said to them, "An even and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh will rise in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and indeed a great than Jonah is here. The queen of the South will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and indeed a greater than Solomon is here."*

Theme: JESUS IS THE GREATEST OF ALL TIME

- Greater than the prophet Jonah
- Greater than wise King Solomon
- Greater than death itself

Dear fellow redeemed in Christ Jesus,

"I am the greatest of all time!" boasted heavy weight fighter Mohammed Ali. And in his day Ali was one of the greatest boxers in the world. He was so great that three times he was the heavy weight champion of the world in boxing. He was considered to be so great that he was actually given the nickname, "The Greatest." But as great as he was in the ring, today the greatest of all time can barely feed himself. Those once feared fists of Ali now tremble as a result of Parkinson's Disease.

Mohammed Ali is but one of many men throughout the history of the world that thought themselves to be the greatest. Men like Nebuchadnezzar or Saddam Hussein. But all of those great men have one thing in common - none were able to fight off sin and death. Every one of them will one day die and their bodies will be lowered into the ground where it will return to the dust from whence it was taken.

There is but one that truly deserves to be call the Greatest, and that is Jesus Christ. He is greater than even the greatest. He is greater than the prophet Jonah, greater than wise king Solomon, and greater even than death. Let us this morning consider how Jesus is the greatest of all time! May the Spirit through His Word strengthen our faith in Him. Amen.

GREATER THAN THE PROPHET JONAH

Have you ever wished God would give you a sign? Maybe you wished for a sign when you were trying to make a decision. That God would somehow intervene and show you what to do. Or maybe you wished for a sign when you were struggling with your faith - maybe a sign to reassure you that God is out there and listening to you. But read through the four Gospels. How many signs did Jesus give that He was the Son of God, the promised Messiah, the Savior of the

world? How many sick people did He heal? How many dead people were raised to life? And though Jesus did all those signs what happened to Him? He was crucified and none of those who saw the signs tried to stop it.

In today's sermon text we find the scribes and Pharisees asking Jesus for a sign. "**Teacher,**" they said, "**we want to see a sign from You.**" It seems like a innocent enough and harmless request they make of Jesus. Certainly it was not asking too much of the omnipotent Son of God to give them a sign of His power. But if you were to open your bibles to Matthew chapter 12 and read of the events that led up to this request, you would quickly realize just how disingenuous that question was. These same men had just seen Jesus drive a demon from a blind and mute man. And once that man was freed from that demon he could see and hear perfectly. Upon seeing this display of Jesus' power the Pharisees claimed that Jesus was casting out demons by the Beelzebub, the ruler of demons. (Mt 12:22-24)

Like so many in Jesus' day, these scribes and Pharisees had seen more than enough signs from Jesus yet refused to believe in Him. So Jesus harshly answers them, "**An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign.**" Those who seek after signs do so because they are not satisfied with the Word of God - Scripture is not enough for them. The scribes and Pharisees refused to believe in Jesus and all the Old Testament prophecies that clearly pointed to Him as the Messiah.

Rather than spending our time wishing for signs, we do better searching the Scriptures looking for answers. And as we do we find some great men who did great things. Take for instance the prophet Jonah. God called Jonah to preach a message of repentance to the people of Nineveh. Now Nineveh was a great city - so large that it took three days to walk throughout the city. The people of Nineveh were wicked in God's sight and He was going to destroy it. But before He would do so, He sent Jonah to preach a word of warning. When the people of Nineveh heard the Word of God from Jonah they repented. From the greatest to the least of them, including the king, they repented of their sin.

Now did they require a sign from Jonah before they would believe? No! What then led this wicked city to repentance? Only the power of God's Word! It cut them to the heart and they believed the message that Jonah preached to them. What a great prophet Jonah must have been to lead an entire heathen city to repentance!

As great as Jonah was, Jesus is greater. He is the great Prophet that God had been promising throughout the centuries. Jesus Himself is the Word. Jesus calls us to repent of our sins and believe the good news that He came to save sinners! Those who will not listen to the great Prophet Jesus, will remain unbelieving no matter how many signs they see.

GREATER THAN WISE KING SOLOMON

It's amazing how far someone will go for something that is important to them. For instance people will drive thousands of miles for the opportunity to see family for only a few days, because that is important to them. I know yesterday that one of our families drove hundreds of miles to shoot free-throws. To some of us that may seem like a long way to go, but this was important to that family and the miles meant nothing to them.

The Queen of Sheba came a long way to see King Solomon and test his wisdom. It is generally assumed that the queen of the South, as Jesus refers to her, came from the southern tip of the Arabian peninsula. If that is true, she would have traveled over 1,000 miles by camel to visit Solomon in Jerusalem. It would have been a trip that would have taken several days if not

over a week to travel by camel through the desert. But the Queen of Sheba thought nothing of the distance or difficult travel. She wanted to hear the wisdom of Solomon for herself. Imagine how great Solomon's wisdom was that she would be willing to travel all that way to hear it!

Now did the Queen of Sheba require some sort of sign before leaving her palace in Saudi Arabia? No. She had heard of the wisdom which God had given Solomon and wanted to test that wisdom for herself. Yet in our sermon text, the Jews had one greater than Solomon standing right there with them - Jesus Christ. His wisdom knew no limits. As the very Son of God He was active in creating all the laws of the universe and the human brain. He gave Solomon his wisdom. And though one greater than Solomon was amongst them, they despised Him and His wisdom. For them, the example of the queen of the South would condemn them because she was willing to go so far to hear Solomon's wisdom, but they despised the Wisest of the wise as He walked among them.

Thankfully we don't have to travel thousands of miles on a camel across the desert to hear the wisdom of Jesus. Every time the Scriptures are read in church, Jesus bestows His wisdom on us. Every time we read our Bibles at home, we get to hear the omniscient, all-knowing Son of God speak to us. Would the Queen of Sheba put us to shame for neglecting something so important and yet so near to each of us?

GREATER THAN DEATH ITSELF

Remember the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus? How the rich man had his reward in this life, but upon death he was condemned to suffer eternally in hell? Along with asking Abraham for a drop of water to wet his tongue, he asked that Lazarus be sent from heaven to warn his family about the impending doom of hell. The rich man was convinced that if a man were to rise from the dead and warn them, that they would repent and believe. Do you remember Abraham's response? ***"If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead."*** (Lk 16:31)

The scribes and Pharisees hinted that before they could believe in Jesus as the Messiah, they first had to see a sign from them. As we heard earlier, what sign would have been enough? They had just seen Jesus cast a demon out of a man, restoring his sight and speech. But this sign, they said, Jesus had done by the power of the devil. No sign would have been enough for them to believe. They were using it as an excuse for not believing in Jesus. They had Moses and the prophets who prophesied of Jesus, but they would not listen to them. If they would not listen to the Word, no sign would convince them of who Jesus was.

Listen once again to Jesus response to the request for a sign: ***"An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth."*** Jesus points to the ultimate sign which He would perform - the sign of the prophet Jonah.

Jonah, we heard in our Old Testament Lesson, was swallowed by a giant fish because he refused to preach to the Ninevites. Jonah remained in the belly of that fish there for three days and three nights until God caused that fish to spit Jonah onto dry land. Those three days were a picture of what Jesus would do. When Jesus died, He would be placed in the belly of the earth for three days and three nights - as the Jews count days and nights. He would be dead and buried. But on the third day He would rise to life from His cold tomb.

Easter is the great sign that separates Jesus from all others. Many great men have come

and gone on this earth - but all of them remain dead and buried to this day. There have been many great prophets and wise kings which have walked this earth. All of them, except Enoch and Elijah, died and decay in the earth. On Easter Jesus showed that He is greater than them all. By rising from the dead He showed that He is greater than even death itself.

This greatness of Jesus means everything to us. It means we can trust Him with the salvation of our souls. It means our sins died with Him and now in Him we have a new life. It means God has declared us not-guilty, justified! What more do we need from Jesus than proof that He is greater than death itself?! Praise be to the eternally great one, Jesus Christ, who is greater than the greatest prophet, wiser than the wisest, and more powerful than even death and gives us the victory through faith in Him! He is risen indeed! Hallelujah! Amen.