

“A Little Greatness”

Scripture: Mark 9:30-37

Graphics: children, greatness

Big Truth: The people of the PUMC are called to continue to radically reorient their lives to the kingdom of God and not the kingdoms of this world. Greatness is not defined by us or the world, but by Jesus and His kingdom. Greatness is measured by how little we can get to serve others from the last place, not by our high status, big bank accounts, giftedness, nor anything else apart from love for God and others.

Focus Phrase: Jesus calls me to radically give up desire for greatness, and get little in His name.

1. Introduction

- A. One of my favorite movies growing up in the 80s was BIG, starring Tom Hanks. It was a fantasy film, in which a young boy named Josh Baskin makes a wish to be BIG in order to impress a girl, after finding out he's too short to ride a certain amusement park ride. Well, his wish came true, and for most of the rest of the film, Josh was the same Josh INSIDE, but has aged into a man's body.
- B. As you can imagine, Josh gets into all kinds of trouble, because people think he's an adult. He also, though, has a whole lot of fun - even making toys - because he has the heart and mind of a child...and sees life through a child's eyes.
- C. The moral of the story is that as we grow up, we should never lose sight of what it means to be child-like...and to see life through the eyes and heart of a child, even when we get gray.
- D. We're spending time this fall walking through the middle of the gospel of Mark...through Jesus' teachings and miracles. Along the way, Jesus is doing his level best to convince the disciples of who He is, what He expects, and how they are to BE disciples. What they'll find is that what **they** THINK is the role and life a disciple is not really what Jesus has in mind.
- E. Jesus' invitation to follow Him entails a willingness to be humble and small... not achieving some high status or becoming big shots for God.
- F. It's a lot like Josh Baskin in BIG. It has more to do with allowing littleness to invade their bigness than it is for bigness with Jesus to give them status for ministry.
- G. Our text today tells us about one day, while Jesus and the disciples were going from the Mount of Transfiguration through Galilee to Capernaum, and Jesus said some **very heavy adult things** to the disciples...
- H. Unfortunately, the disciples were caught up in an argument about being great and who among them was the greatest...kind of a childish discussion compared to Jesus' statements.

- I. There's a lot we can learn from Jesus' teaching today. If you're taking notes, write this down: **Jesus calls me to radically give up desire for greatness, and get little in His name.**
- J. Let's pray and then we'll dive into Mark 9:30-37 this morning...
- K. PRAY!!**
- L. Grab your bibles and let's go! Mark 9:30...

2. Scripture

A. READ Mark 9:30-37

- B. If Mark's gospel is generally laid out in chronological order of events, which we think it is in most places, then Jesus, Peter, James, and John (in Mark 9) were ON the Mount of Transfiguration, then they came DOWN the mountain to find the other 9 disciples arguing with crowds and religious leaders.
- C. Jesus then healed a boy from a seizure condition while the boy's father prayed for faith in Jesus and His power. We talked about that last week...
- D. Then, Jesus and the disciples were moving from there through Galilee to Capernaum, located on the northern end of the Sea of Galilee.
- E. Along the way, **two things** were highlighted by Mark:
 - i. First, Jesus made his second prediction to the disciples about his death and resurrection (the first was in Mark 8); and,
 - ii. Second, the disciples began arguing with each other about who was greatest.
- F. Jesus' statements were heavy and serious...the disciples' argument was childish and frivolous.
- G. So, why were the disciples arguing about who was greatest? We're not totally sure, but we can imagine that the 9 disciples who did NOT get to go up the mountain with Jesus were a little down in the mouth about it.
- H. Add to that the fact that in the beginning of Mark 9, those same 9 disciples couldn't heal the man's son of his seizure condition, and they were thinking, "Am I really a terrible disciple?" And because they felt threatened or thought they had to defend their calling, they began to argue about greatness.
- I. We don't have any other insight into the argument along the road, but suffice to say, Jesus KNEW what they were arguing about...and ask them about it.
- J. "What were you arguing about on the way?" The disciples' answer? (...) (cricket, cricket) Silence!
- K. Busted!**
- L. Jesus was talking about big kingdom things...and the disciples were arguing about little petty things.

- M. Jesus wasn't about to let this teaching moment pass, though...and so we see a **shift at this point**...from colleague to teacher. From road companion to rabbi.
- N. Directly addressing their childishness, Jesus sat down (which, in that culture, indicated that he was taking the role of teacher/rabbi) and said, "Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all."
- i. Whoever wants to be first... whoever wants status or importance - not in the world's eyes, but in God's eyes - in God's kingdom, which is of infinite importance...
 - ii. Must (no ifs or maybes here) **must be last of all**...now, this IS from a world's perspective...last, least, littlest, lowest...compared to who? ALL others. That's a tall order since only ONE can be last. But, if you think about it, this is a heart issue...an intentional act of putting yourself last.
 - iii. Last of ALL AND...AND servant of (who?) ALL. Always seeking to serve others instead of being served. Always making others great instead of striving for worldly greatness.
- O. There are a whole lot of football players about to take the field today whose #1 goal is to not only BE great at football, but for the entire world to say it about them. And they will do everything to prove it. There's no argument. Yet, they're playing a game...a GAME. You know I love football (Go Bills!), but we've created an ongoing competition to see who's the greatest. That's really no different than the argument the disciples were having...it just includes multi-million dollar contracts.
- P. Jesus was pretty clear - the one who wants to be first in God's kingdom, must be last of all and servant of all in the world.
- Q. And then, in one of the most upside-down, mind-blowing sermon illustrations the disciples had ever seen, Jesus, sitting in the house (probably of Peter's mother-in-law, which I've been to), **invites a child into his arms**.
- R. To our 21st century ears, that doesn't seem unusual at ALL, right? Jesus was hanging with the disciples and he invited a child and said, "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me."
- S. What we need to know, however, is that in the 1st Century Jewish culture, children were **non-persons**. Literally, they were property with no status at ALL. They were not to be seen or heard while guests were in the house, especially a rabbi of Jesus' status. For the child to be anywhere near by them was scandalous...and for Jesus to intentionally place the child into their midst was impossible...preposterous.

- T. The Greek word Jesus used for “welcome” here was dexomai, which means to warmly welcome or receive fondly and fully. This wasn’t a matter of tolerating the child, but of making the child an honored guest.
- U. There was no one in society LOWER than this little child. Jesus was asking the disciples to quit foolishly blabbering on about who among them was the greatest...and agree that the greatest among them NOW...was this little child.
- V. And IF (big IF) they could do THAT simple yet impossible thing, then they would also be welcoming “the one who sent me...” God the Father and His will...
- W. And if we circle back to what Jesus said to the disciples on the road, what it meant for the disciples to receive God the Father, by welcoming this non-person, was that they also needed to welcome and receive the Father’s will for Jesus to be “betrayed, killed, and rise again...”
- X. In that moment, this child was how Jesus called the disciples to follow His lead to die to self, making themselves last and servant to ALL.
- Y. THAT was true greatness.
- Z. One commentator said, “Jesus’ disciples weren't to be concerned with who gets to go up the mountain and witness extraordinary visions. They weren’t to worry about who has power to cast out demons or not. Rather they were to welcome and serve all, especially those who, like a child, have no status whatsoever. In other words, though some may attempt to distort Jesus' words into some sort of formula for achieving kingdom greatness, such an effort is absolutely misguided and a perversion of his message.”

3. Application

- A. **Jesus calls us - you and me - to radically give up desire for world greatness, and get little in His name for others.**
- B. To take that one step farther, ultimately, greatness looks like you and me dying on a cross after having been beaten and abused by the world.
- C. Greatness looks like taking a small child - a non-person - into your arms to dexomai them - to welcome and receive them to be loved with God’s love.
- D. There are some pretty obvious applications to this teaching for us. The one that jumps out to me is the fact that we’re a congregation that is intentional about protecting our children and vulnerable adults. We do that by implementing and living out our Safe Sanctuaries Guidelines. And we do that together in order to welcome and protect such children as Jesus had in his midst. And we implement and train ourselves for that in VBS, Sunday School, Connections After School Ministry, Youth Group, and every other place where we are charged to love our kids.

- E. But more than that, the kingdom message in this teaching from Jesus IS clear: There is no place for positioning ourselves for worldly greatness.
- F. Instead, here's what Jesus is calling you to do:
- i. One, **Get little with those who are little** - Jesus did
 - a. Even though you may be an adult with responsibilities and important things to do, that's even more reason why Jesus wants to use you to lead and love the littlest, least, last, and lowest.
 - b. There's no one that's disqualified to be part of the kingdom of God simply because of who they are. Jesus sat and welcomed a little child.
 - c. This isn't about physically shrinking or becoming childish - but about viewing your life through the lens of a child. If you were a child, what would welcoming, loving, and receiving look like?
 - d. So often, you and I get caught up in ourselves and forget to look around for the person who is lonely, little, and least.
 - e. Who are you missing, walking by, or ignoring either without knowing it, or intentionally turning the other way or by dismissing them?
 - f. Your call (and I know it's your call because it's everyone's call) is to get little with and for those who are little...and not just children.
 - ii. Second, **Stop trying to convince others that you're great** - only God is great
 - a. We all struggle constantly with positioning ourselves, ranking ourselves, and, in essence, arguing with others who is greatest. Isn't that what social media is hoping to achieve? Who has the best vacation, best family, best marriage, best house, best hobby, best drone, best job?
 - b. We brag so that others will want to be us. We need to be right and in control - large and in-charge.
 - c. You have gifts, yes. You are serving, yes. You are skilled at things, for sure. But, those things are gifts from God.
 - d. We're very quick to take personal credit for the good gifts from God, but give God all the blame when something goes wrong. That's an oversimplification, but I don't think it's too far from reality in my life.
 - e. When you and I stop trying to convince others how great WE are, then Jesus has the chance to show the world how great GOD is.
 - f. Get little...stop trying to convince others you're great...and
 - iii. Then, **Be last of all and servant of all** - that's true greatness
 - a. This is the hard one, isn't it?

- b. There's a piece of each of us that doesn't want to be last for anything... we fear we'll miss out on something good! We want to be great!
- c. The serving part seems a little easier to do, especially when serving those who say thank you, enjoy your service, and lift you up.
- d. Yet, the child in Jesus' midst could do NONE of that, ever. If you and I are to serve like Jesus asks, it is best when it's lowest, ignored, under-appreciated, thankless, and fruitless.
- e. And, that, loved ones, is the hardest place to be for us...but it's exactly where Jesus is calling you and me to be.

4. Conclusion

- A. When Josh Baskin got BIG in that movie, he thought it would mean greatness, access, status, attraction of the opposite sex, and so much more. He thought being an adult was a way better option than being a child.
- B. What he found was that he was always trying to get back to where he loved life's simplicity and fun. He just wanted to be a kid again...which he did at the end of the movie (sorry to spoil it - but you saw it coming, right?)
- C. Littleness can grow into bigness and function in this world, but bigness is only big, in Jesus' eyes, when it intentionally gets little in His name.
- D. Your homework for this week is to find one child or vulnerable person, and spend 5 minutes with them, without YOUR agenda taking over. Just listen, ask questions, and then pray with them. Love and serve them...putting them first.
- E. Think of one person right now and make that happen...and then let me know how it went for you...and them?
- F. If you do that, you'll see what a little greatness looks like. And Jesus'll smile.
- G. PRAY!
- H. Jesus Loves Me song...let's channel our inner-child...