

King of Glory Lutheran Church

Pastor Ruth Ann Loughry

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Pentecost 19: Mark 9: 30-37

“The Greatest of them All”

Jesus overturns the disciples understanding of what it means to be great. Can we overturn our understanding as well? Whoever serves is the greatest.

Remember the villainess in the Disney movie, Snow White? The evil queen would go to her talking mirror regularly and say, “Mirror, mirror, on the wall, who is the fairest of them all?” Of course the mirror would respond, “Thou, art Queen, are the fairest in the land.” And she was, until Snow White surpassed the Queen’s beauty. Then mirror told the truth, “Snow White, O Queen, is the fairest of them all.”

Who is the greatest is of them all?” is a question that is as old as time itself.

A much more recent movie that came out in December of 2017, “The Greatest Showman” is a movie about PT Barnum and his circus. As his fame and the fame of his troupe rises, PT begins to focus more on his popularity than his family and his faithful performers. When a scandal erupts and then fire destroys the circus building, PT’s eyes are finally opened to what is most important in life: his wife, daughters and friends. Suddenly his great life isn’t about shows and newspaper articles, it’s about love and relationships and connection.

Who is the greatest of them all? The disciples were arguing about it on the road to Jerusalem. Ironic isn’t it? On the road that will lead to Jesus death and his fame for centuries to come, the disciples are clueless about what greatness means.

We don’t know if they were arguing about who had done the most healings or who did Jesus like the best? Or perhaps who had the sturdiest sandals and robe? Don’t know the topic, but clearly Jesus didn’t like the conversation at hand.

So his rebuke isn’t quite as strong as it was to Peter last week, “Get behind me Satan.” Yet it must have stung a little bit.

“Whoever wants to be first must be last of all, be servant to all. See these children? If you welcome a younger person, you will be welcoming God.”

Remember that in Jesus’ day, He lived in an honor and shame culture. Children had no honor or credibility to lend to anyone’s status. They were completely

dependent upon others for their care. They had no rights, no status, even no legal protection.

So for Jesus to lift up a child as honored was a complete role reversal! And God bless them, a little difficult for the disciples to wrap their heads around. Once again Jesus turns the common day framework of life into a new expectation.

You and I live in a culture that honors power and money and status and talents and fame. Google the 10 highest awards in America and up pops pictures of the Emmy Award, the Grammy's, the Nobel Peace Prize, the Golden Globe, the Pulitzer, the Heisman Trophy, the Vince Lombardi. What is it? What does it represent? Talents! Admiration! Intellect! Team work! Sportsmanship! The mutual respect of fellow workers in a common vocation.

At their best those trophies are all those things and more. At their basest, they are trophies to take home and put on a shelf. Items that will gather dust. (Easy for me to say, I've never gotten one!)

Picture this! The unknown newcomer gets out of the black stretch limo and puts his foot onto the red carpet. His tux is of the finest fabric, his olive skin striking against his black hair. The photographers begin to click their shutters as the stranger pauses at the photo spot. After dinner just as the MC for the night walk to take the microphone, the handsome stranger walks to the stage and says, "You all are very talented people. You've used your gifts well and entertained millions. Thank you for your hard work. But I have one question. How many children are still hungry? How many don't have a bed to sleep in this night? How many will die of malaria tomorrow? My name is Jesus and these are the ones to be celebrated."

Since the beginning of time, the Old Adam in humanity drives us to be better than others. The story in Mark says the disciples were afraid to ask Jesus about what was coming next, His suffering and death. This story reminds me of families who struggle with Mom or Dad's death so the siblings begin arguing about the estate or the casket or who gets what in the house after the funeral.

At times it is fear which drives us back inside ourselves making the way for low self-image to inflict it's power on others. At times we long to be accepted so we bully our way into relationships or we say things just to make connections and feel like we're 'in' the group. Climbing the corporate ladder, the social staircase,

thinking of ourselves first, making the neighborhood news becomes more important than...love, relationships and connection.

Our fears are real. The disciples were probably scared at one level. How can Jesus say he is going to die? He's not going to die. He'll become our King. Surely he will.

But Jesus doesn't talk about royal robes and officers in court. Instead Jesus says, "Look at this little one. See her. Look how hungry he is. Her sweater is two sizes too small. Will you do anything about it?"

Abraham Lincoln once said, "Nearly all men can stand adversity, but if you want to test a man's character, give him power." (repeat)

Right now we have reality TV shows about dating and houses filled with people lying behind each other's back. Do these demonstrate greatness? What do they teach?

Where have you seen great people? I've seen great people who are employed in nursing homes. Nurses who feed meals spoonful by spoonful to those who cannot feed themselves. Hospice workers who turn the dying on their sides so they don't get bed sores. Doctors who make late hour hospital calls. Teachers who spend their own money so that students have a few more supplies for that special project.

Do any of these get a trophy? Do any of these think of themselves more than others?

What if we had reality TV shows that followed people around who do one kind act after another? The answer, Jesus says, is in serving our brothers and sisters. Serving the little ones – making certain they are fed and safe and protected.

The ELCA has developed a ministry called **AMMPARO**—Accompanying Migrant Minors with Protection, Advocacy, Representation and Opportunities—is a ministry of the ELCA that is seeking to create a network of welcoming congregations to serve children who are forced to flee their communities because of violence, poverty, environmental displacement, or lack of opportunities in El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala. In an interview with *Living Lutheran*, AMMPARO program director Mary Campbell said: "We'd like to see at the end of five years that all 9,000 of our congregations know about AMMPARO and can find a place to be involved in some way. Ninety-two verses in the Bible are about welcoming the stranger. It's our responsibility as people of faith to walk with all people for justice and fairness, and for the potential

for lives as children of God” (“AMMPARO: A call to welcome,” K.T. Sancken, February 8, 2017).

Pastor Carlos who is already an Ammparo shepherd, came to KOG’s council to ask if we might consider becoming an AMMPARO congregation. We are considering his request.

LFS!

In just a few short weeks, we are once again welcoming the stranger into our midst through Angel House. For some of us, we’ve never encountered someone living in a shelter. We’ve never talked to a person down on their luck. Do not fear what you do not understand or have never experienced! Nancy French will help you. She will walk you through it every step of the way. Jesus says, “the first are the ones who serve those who are dependent upon them, those who have no status, those who are vulnerable.” These are the ‘children’ in our midst.

And if we serve, we welcome God’s very presence into the room. Now that’s what I call great! How about you?

Amen.