

Mark 9:30-37

Who Is The Greatest? Well, that all depends on what you **mean** with that question. In **baseball** the team which is the **greatest** wins the **World Series**. In **football**, they win the **Super Bowl**. But there are lots of **other** ways to measure **Who Is The Greatest** - both inside as well as outside of **sports**. For example, who is the greatest **inventor** - Benjamin Franklin or Thomas Edison? Who is the greatest **president** - George Washington or Abraham Lincoln? Who is the greatest late-night **talk show host** - Jack Paar or Johnny Carson - Jay Leno or Conan O'Brien? When it comes to **athletes** there are **great** ones all over. In basketball it's **Michael Jordan** - in hockey **Wayne Gretzke** - and in boxing **Mohammed Ali**. So the question still remains, **Who Is The Greatest?**

In our text for today, Jesus' disciples had the same question. St. Mark tells us, *"When Jesus was in the house, He asked His disciples, 'What were you arguing about on the road?' But they kept quiet, because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest."* Jesus and His disciples had just returned to **Capernaum** - their **headquarters** in the province of Galilee. On the way, the disciples had **argued** among themselves as to who was the **greatest** among **them**. Who does Jesus like **best**? Who will be the **generals** and who will be the **privates** in His kingdom? Who is doing the **best job**? Perhaps this discussion of **rank** was prompted because on a number of occasions, Jesus had **separated** Peter, James, and John as an "inner circle" of disciples. Perhaps it was brought about by something else. But ultimately, James hit the bulls-eye in today's Second Lesson. He wrote, *"What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you?"* It is the **nature** of man to be **proud** of himself, or **envious**, and **jealous** of others. These petty jealousies between Jesus' chosen 12 disciples presented the potential for **severe damage** to the work of Christ's kingdom.

We aren't exempt from those petty jealousies either. Isn't it amazing how we can be **jealous** of those who can memorize Bible passages, or write Christian poetry, or speak about Jesus more easily than **we** can? Why should it **bother** us if someone can preach or teach; sing or pray; plan or organize; work or play with more **skill**, or more **effectively** than **we** can? We need to keep our sinful human nature in **check**. As Christians, we're not **competing** against one another - we're members of the **same team** - working **together** for the same purpose. There is **no room** for jealousy. Rather, we need to **thank God** that He has provided our **teammates** with so **many** wonderful and different talents and abilities, and we

need to thank Him that He has **also** provided them with the **willingness** and the **opportunity** to use them so faithfully.

Jesus' disciples had blown the idea of **rank** completely out of proportion. In fact, they had actually turned it **upside-down**. It was time for Jesus to give them some serious, formal instruction on the topic of **greatness**. Our text continues, "*Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, 'If anyone wants to be **first**, he must be the very **last**, and the **servant of all**.'*" It seems that the disciples had swallowed the **world's** view of greatness hook, line, and sinker. They were looking for **titles**, for **position** - for **power**, **prestige**, and **influence**. But, Jesus pointed out that the qualities which **He** is looking for in **His** leaders are **humility** and **service**. Jesus wasn't **opposed** to the idea of His disciples seeking to be **first** in His kingdom. Rather, Jesus was opposed to the **way** they were going about it. So, using a little **child** as a visual aid, Jesus taught His disciples a lesson about **true** greatness.

Our text continues, "*Taking the child in His arms, Jesus said to the disciples, 'Whoever welcomes one of these little **children** in My name welcomes **Me**; and whoever welcomes **Me**, does not welcome **Me**, but the one who **sent Me**.'*" How do you get to be **great** in God's kingdom - by becoming the **servant of all**. The easiest place to **begin** that process, is by serving those who need the **most** attention - little **children**. If this idea seemed **strange** to the disciples, it was only because they hadn't been watching **Jesus** closely enough. It is remarkable how **often** a busy man like Jesus was found **surrounded** by little children! He loved them dearly, and He showed that love by giving them the **time** and **attention** they so desperately needed. Jesus emphasized this for His disciples in our text. There they were in the middle of a big **theology** lesson, and what did Jesus do? He took the time to give a little child a **hug**, and to tell His disciples that serving the spiritual needs of **children** is the same as welcoming **Him** - and the Heavenly **Father** too.

That should say a **lot** to all of **us**. True greatness is achieved, and love for our Savior is expressed, in meeting the **spiritual needs** of **children**. Don't be misled into thinking that God wants you to strive for earthly **wealth** and **possessions**, or high **social** standing, or great **power** and **influence** in this world. Rather, Jesus has a **high** place in heaven for those moms and dads, pastors and teachers, brothers and sisters, who don't overlook the **little ones**.

I'd like to read for you an item which I ran across called [Small Hands](#). I

think it has a lot to say to **each** of us. It reads, “*When a boy or girl thrusts their **small hand** in yours, it may be **smeared** with chocolate ice cream, or **grimy** from petting a dog, and there may be a **wart** under the right thumb and a **bandage** on the little finger. But the most **important** thing about their **hands** is that they are the hands of the **future**. These are the **hands** that someday may hold a **Bible** or a **revolver**; they may play the church **piano**, or spin a **gambling** wheel; they may **gently** dress a leper’s wound or **tremble** wretchedly - **uncontrolled** by an alcoholic mind. But right now the **hand** is in yours. It asks for **help** and **guidance**. It represents a full-fledged personality in **miniature**, to be **respected** as a separate individual whose day-by-day growth into mature Christian **adulthood** is **your** responsibility.” Jesus **recognized** that responsibility, and He willingly met the physical, spiritual, and emotional needs of **children**. Jesus looks with high **favor** on those who will look **past** their **own** wants and needs, in order to bring the little children to **Him**. They may be **small**, but they are very **important** to Jesus.*

I don’t think we dare overlook the fact that Jesus is important to the little **children** as well. We have no clue regarding the **identity** of that little child in our text. Yet, he had obviously spent some time with Jesus **before**, and **knew** Him well. There was no **doubt** about that child’s **love** for his Savior. When Jesus called him over and took him in His arms, that little child didn’t **resist**. He didn’t **question** what was going on. He wasn’t **afraid**. He just snuggled into Jesus with complete **trust**, knowing that he was **safe** in Jesus’ arms.

Jesus would **often** use the example of childlike faith and humble trust, to illustrate the confidence which **everyone** should have in Him. That’s another advantage to spending lots of time around **little ones**. The more you are **with** them, the more you become **like** them. Some people would call that **regression**. In fact many parents have caught themselves speaking to other **adults** in s-l-o-w ... d-e-l-i-b-e-r-a-t-e ... s-e-n-t-e-n-c-e-s. Many parents have also found themselves actually **enjoying** programs on public television like Sesame Street and Mr. Roger’s Neighborhood (although Barney and the Teletubbies are a little hard for **many** of them to swallow). But more **importantly**, many parents have grown in their knowledge and understanding of **God** and His **Word** - as they took the time to **read** those familiar Bible stories to their children - as they **listened** to Bible tapes and CDs, or **watched** Bible-story DVDs and videos - or as they took the time to help their children **memorize** simple Bible **passages**, and the chief parts of Luther’s Small Catechism. As parents help their **children** grow in the knowledge of God’s Word, they **themselves** grow stronger - more **childlike** - more **confident** - more **trusting**. And if that’s **regression**, then we should **all** regress more **often**!

That's what Jesus was trying to get across to His **disciples**. They had been **ashamed** to tell Jesus that they had been **arguing** about who was the **greatest**. Instead, they **should** have been ashamed that they didn't even understand what **greatness** is all about. We certainly have the opportunity to witness the **greatness** of childlike **faith** in our families. But we **also** have that opportunity **apart** from our **individual** families. For the past 154 years, our congregation has existed as a **spiritual** family - a group of people who have been bringing **God's Word** to the people of our area - young and old alike. Over the years we have had the opportunity to **serve** our children with **God's Word** in our Lutheran Boy and Girl Pioneer programs; as well as in our Lutheran Elementary School, Vacation Bible School, Sunday School, and even in our Little Lambs Sunday School class designed for children from birth to 3 years old - programs which lead children to the arms of their **Savior** - programs which can **always** use your **help**. **You** can make a **difference**. As the familiar **mission** hymn says, "***You can lead the little children to the Savior's waiting arms.***" All you have to do is **volunteer**. May God enable us **all** to experience real **greatness** in His kingdom, as we continue to teach our children about **Jesus** their **Savior** - who **loved** them, and **gave Himself** for them. Amen.