“HAVING THE HEART AND HANDS OF A SERVANT”

Mark 10:35-45    October 18th, 2015

The greatest. Who is the greatest?

Let’s play a guessing game. Which sporting event had the greatest viewing audience ever? The 2004 summer Olympics, 3.8 billion people.

Who won the greatest number of Olympic medals? 18. Larissa Latynina, the gymnast from the USSR, won 18 medals between 1956-64.

Which American won the greatest number of Olympic medals? Mark Spitz, the swimmer who won 11 medals from 1968-72.

Who do Americans say was the greatest boxer of all time? Mohammed Ali. Better known as “The Greatest.”

Who is the greatest golfer of all time? Jack Nicklaus who won a record 18 majors?

Who do Americans say was the greatest scientist of this century? Albert Einstein?

Which singing group sold the greatest number platinum albums? The Beatles.

Who do Americans say was the greatest American president? Abraham Lincoln in today’s polls.

The list of “greats” and “greatest” goes on and on. It is one thing to BE the greatest Olympian, to BE the greatest boxer, to BE the greatest golfer, to BE the Greatest scientist, to BE the greatest president. It is quite another thing to have a Need to BE number one, have a need to be a big shot, a need to be better than others.

None of us really like those people who need to be THE greatest, but that is what the gospel lesson is all about today. Some disciples needed to be
number one, the best of the disciples, better than other disciples. Some disciples had a need to be top dog, religious big shots, da leaders of da pack. They didn’t get it” when Jesus invited us to be servants. Some people who had walked really closely with Jesus still didn’t “get it” that the greatest person in the kingdom of God was the person who had the heart of a servant. James and John didn’t “get it.”

In today’s story James and John approached Jesus and said, “Jesus, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.” Isn’t that an unimaginably selfish and self-centered statement? What an arrogant, proud attitude!!

Jesus said, “What do you want me to do for you?” Jesus asked these two disciples that question and asks us that question as well, “What do you really want from me?”

James and John answered, revealing their self-centered and self-serving hearts, “Grant us to sit at your right hand and at your left when you come again in glory.” What?!?!?! Talk about warped thinking and glory hounding! These two disciples wanted to be the number one and two guys on the judgment day when Jesus came again in glory.

The truth finally came out. JJ, James and John, wanted glory. They wanted the Son of Man would suffer, be killed and on the third day rise from the dead. James and John had visions of themselves in the future: one at the right hand of Jesus in glory; one at the left hand of Jesus in glory. Obviously, James and John didn’t “get it.”

Jesus said, “Do you know what you are asking?” Are you able to be baptized as I am going to be baptized?” “Yes,” they replied. Not understanding that Jesus was going to be baptized into his suffering and death on the cross.

The text says, “The other ten disciples became angry with James and John.”
The other ten disciples became angry at JJ for their inflated, selfish, brazen ambition. Jesus then taught them, “Whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant. Whoever wished to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” And James and John?? They still didn’t get it. Which goes to prove that you can be a follower of Jesus Christ and still not “get it.” Eventually, JJ did. They finally learned the lesson that Jesus was trying to teach them.

The same is true of us. We too can be followers of Jesus. Walk with Jesus. Talk with Jesus. Hang out with Jesus’ friends and still not “get it” about being a servant of others. We can use the right religious buzz words and go to church and attend confirmation, but still not get that basic lesson of life that Jesus was trying to teach JJ and all of us. The greatest person in God’s sight is a person who has a heart of humble service toward God and others.

Let me share of story about a person who has the heart and hands of a servant. Pastor Edward Markquart tells about a man who is an illustration of the kind of person that God wants us to be: servants of God and others. Just as Jesus was a servant of God and others.

“I went down to the hospital in Puyallup the other day and saw Bill Grant. Bill Grant is fighting pancreatic cancer and is losing the battle and is going home, soon to die under the care of his loving wife and Hospice. Bill was the owner of The Des Moines Creek Restaurant for years and his wife Mary made luscious, homemade, red raspberry Devonshire pies. After he had been living with pancreatic cancer and its treatments, Bill still went down to Mississippi with a mission team from our congregation to work on devastated homes that were wrecked by the hurricane Rita and Katrina. As it turned out, Bill ended up
running a kitchen and feeding 200-300 volunteer workers per day. People in our parish remember Bill with his outstretched hands up in triumphant and with a smile lighting up his whole face as he fed that mass of volunteers another meal. Nobody knew that Bill was fighting cancer and didn’t realize why the color of his skin was that color. Bill not only went down to Mississippi to rebuild houses one time: he went down a second time. To be with his adult son as they worked on this project together. Bill, in the eyes of our team who was with him down in Mississippi, was an inspiration, a source of encouragement, a mountain of motivation that energized and touched all who saw Bill in action. Bill had and still has the heart and hands of a servant.

A servant always has a loving heart and working hands. Both the heart and the hands. Not just the heart of a servant who sees the needs of others. Not just a heart who feels the pain of those who lost their homes in hurricanes. Not just a heart who empathizes with those who have lost their jobs, income and insurance.

Servants always have good, loving and generous hearts, but they also have hands to do the dirty work. Hands that make all the meals. Hands that clean up the tables. Hands that do the dishes. Hands that actually help people in their needs.

Heart and hands.

In the gospel text for today, Jesus said that whoever is great among you, MUST be a servant. You cannot be a disciple of Jesus without being a servant, without having the heart and hands of a servant. Being a servant is a MUST, a demand, like water being wet and fire being hot and ice being cold. So a follower of Christ MUST be a servant.

If fire is not hot, it is not fire.

If ice is not cold, it is not ice.
If a follower of Chris is not a servant, he or she is not a disciple.

Jesus said, “Whoever follows me, MUST be your servant.”

A little bit more about Bill in Pastor Markquart’s words: One day while seeing Bill in the hospital, I told him and his charge nurse that we were in the presence of greatness when we were in Bill’s presence. I told his charge nurse that both Bill and Mary had raised 24 foster children and infants in their home, before they owned the Des Moines Creek Restaurant. I told his charge nurse that we were in the presence of greatness when we were in Bill’s hospital room. I just wanted to make sure that she understood that. I knew it to be true. I just want his hospital staff to know who they were caring for. [Bill and Mary are the most humble people, not showing off their life of love, not making any big deal of it, not drawing attention to themselves or any of the many ways they have served.]

Notice in the gospel text for today that Jesus invites us to be servants OF ALL, and we focus on the two words, OF ALL. That includes our spouses, our family, our work connections, and fans out from those to include the whole human race. “You MUST be servants OF ALL.” There are things in life which are more important than others and Jesus’ invitation for us to have the heart and hands of a servant is central to being a disciple of Jesus.

Living the life of a servant is also the essence of what it means to be a human being, whether one is a follower of Christ or not. All great human beings throughout the history of the planet are those who have served the needs of others. For they discovered the gem for living that it is in giving that we receive, that it is in dying to self that we find ourselves.

The words that Jesus gives to us today are the best advice that anyone could ever give: Whoever would be great MUST be a servant. Amen and amen.