

“The Greatest Of All Time” - Mark 10:35-45

Good Morning beautiful people! What a wonderfully glorious September we've had. I am so glad you chose to come and join us today here at Grace UMC in Houghton.

Let me introduce myself to those of you, whom I might not have met yet. My name is Katja Falker and I'm filling in for Pastor Eric, who just happens to be my husband, as he is preaching at our sister church in Painesdale today.

Let's start our time together with a prayer: "Dear God, we praise you as we are together in your house today. We ask you to give us open minds and ears as we endeavor to learn more about your word. Bless us as a church and as Christians who want to live the way you have laid out before us. Amen."

Who is your G.O.A.T.? (*Wait for answers.*) A lot of us are thinking about athletes: Michael Jordan, Kobe Bryant, Simone Biles.

They have certainly earned our admiration for their prowess in their sports. I don't think any of us would disagree that these athletes are amazing. They are great. I'll even add another athlete to this list. He is my personal favorite, and I've been able to watch him work hard and improve. Of course being his mother affords me that privilege. Jonah is a great goal keeper for our Gremlin varsity soccer team. Just look at these photos. As great as all these people are, we are going to take a look at what it takes to be the G.O.A.T. in Jesus' eyes.

I want to put the timing of the scripture that Zach just read for us into perspective. Right before James and John approach their rabbi, Jesus predicts his death for the third time. In Mark 10:32-34 we read this:

They were on their way up to Jerusalem, with Jesus leading the way, and the disciples were astonished, while those who followed were afraid. Again he took the Twelve aside and told them what was going to happen to him. “We are going up to Jerusalem,” he said, “and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles, who will mock him and spit on him, flog him and kill him. Three days later he will rise.” (Mark 10:32-34)

Jesus just shared his heart and agony with his most trusted companions. He was very concise about what the disciples should expect in the near future. They would be losing their teacher very soon, and yet the Sons of Thunder decided that it would be a great idea to ask Jesus if they could sit on his right and left side in his kingdom.

Now, in our time that request doesn't seem quite so odd. The two brothers want to be close to their friend and master. That's not all that surprising.

However, when you dig a little deeper into the customs of Jesus' day, you find that the right hand is considered a side of authority and dominion, while the left hand is a seat of command. So by asking to sit at the left and right hand of Jesus, they are essentially asking to be made the second and third in command in Jesus' coming kingdom.

That makes their request a lot bolder. When we take a closer look at verse 35, we notice that James and John don't ask Jesus right away, but

they ask him to grant whatever they ask. Jesus has to ask them what their actual request is.

This peculiar way of asking reminded me of my kids when they were younger: “Mom, mom, pleeeeeeeeeeease say yes.” I’d have to slow them down and ask, “And what exactly am I supposed to say yes to?” It’s quite funny when your kids do it and you see their excitement and apprehension, but this is not usually the behavior of grown men. (I said “usually”...) Most adults would lead with a more demure question: “Master, could we ask you for a favor?” seems like it might result in a better outcome.

However, James and John are actually applying one of Jesus’ teachings in the Sermon on the Mount. In Matthew 7:7-8 Jesus tells his audience to: *“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.”*

In a way, they were showing that they were listening to Jesus’ teachings. Nonetheless they are met with a despondent rabbi. Jesus is disappointed and has to explain to them that there is much more to their question than what meets the eye. He asks them if they could endure the suffering he is about to go through. Even though they agree that they would, Jesus tells them that despite their willingness to join him in his hurt and hardship, it is not up to him to decide who will occupy the seats to his left and right. Those seats have already been prepared and spoken for.

As it often happens in groups of friends, it doesn’t take very long for the other ten disciples to hear about the conversation. They are not happy with their friends and become indignant with James and John. I can’t say that I blame the ten for their reaction.

As is usual when settling arguments, Jesus calls his followers together to make sure everyone understands the issue at hand.

He explains how the rulers and officials of the gentiles are authorities over their citizens and how they act in a way that shows their subjects that they think they are more important than them. Then he moves on to tell his disciples that they are supposed to behave very differently:

Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” (Mark 10:43-45)

That is a tall order for Jesus' followers back then as well as today. Being a servant in a world where being in charge is the ultimate goal is hard. Jesus uses his life as an example to explain his expectations to the disciples and by extension to us.

What does it mean to be a servant like Jesus? It means living to serve others, following God's will, and putting others' needs before our own. The Bible uses the word servant hundreds of times in both the Old and New Testament. Jesus is considered the ultimate example of a servant leader, and his life and teachings show us how to lead with love, compassion, and humility.

Let's look at a few ways that we can be servants like Jesus.

To start off we should obey God's will. In the New Testament we see Jesus modeling servanthood by obeying God's will over and over again. Even though Jesus knew what agony he would have to go through on the cross, he willingly followed God's orders and died for us, so we could be in fellowship with God despite our sins. While most of us are not asked to be

crucified like Jesus, we can still be obedient to God's will by following the teachings of Jesus.

Another way to be a servant is to be humble. Jesus humbled himself by taking on the nature of a servant and being made in human likeness. Jesus was at the creation. He was with God, he was the word, yet he agreed to be born to a human mother, in a lowly stable, and live a human life. He was already one with God but humbled himself, so that we could have a relationship with God. It should be a lot easier for us to humble ourselves. We are already human and if we are modest, not arrogant, and not thinking of ourselves as better than others, we have achieved a modicum of humility.

Jesus also asks us to help others. Jesus showed that real power comes from humble acts of service, such as washing the feet of his disciples. I don't know if you've ever washed the feet of those you have served with, but it is a very powerful experience. When I was the dean of Black Bear Camp at Lake Louise, I had to heavily rely on my counselors to make sure that camp would be a great experience for our campers. One year our topic was Jesus washing the disciples' feet (John 13:1-17), and I decided that washing my counselors' feet would be a great way to bring that scripture to life for my elementary school aged campers. I did not share my plans with my counselors before our meeting and invited them to come forward one at a time to have their feet washed. The kids were very interested in everything going on, but it was a deeply moving experience for me and my counselors. I don't think there was a dry eye. It takes a lot of trust to be a servant and to have someone serve you.

This next request goes right to the core: Have a servant's heart. A servant's heart means that no job is too small, and that any way you can

help is great. There are so many things that need to be done on a daily basis that we sometimes ignore. At home we will have to eventually ask someone to do them or do them ourselves. At church and in the world there are also lots of little tasks, that seem insignificant in and of themselves, but when they pile up and don't get done, they can become insurmountable.

Here at Grace we offer a Nursery and Sunday School to our children during our worship service, so that they have a safe place to learn about God. We have a youth group meeting for our older children after church, where they can deepen their understanding of who God is and who they are. At the same time we have a college student meeting and an adult Bible study. Our worship service is enriched by our Sunday morning hosts, who lead us through the service, our musicians, who offer their talents so we don't have to sing everything acapella, our audio-visual team, who make sure our microphones, cameras, and YouTube stream are working, and our pastor or guest speakers, who share a message of God's love with us. After the service we all like to enjoy a few goodies and some coffee while we catch up with our friends. All these are wonderful opportunities for us to participate in. We are very blessed to have so many hands behind the scenes, that make these ministries possible. Of course, we always welcome new hands to join the ranks of those servant leaders.

This brings us right to the next way of being a servant leader: Be ready to act. Be ready to act as God nudges and inspires you. If you feel like you can help out with any of our ministries or if you feel called to start a new ministry, do it! Come talk to someone on our leadership team or ask someone you see serving how you can be of help. You might be surprised

how easy it is to get involved and how you fit right into your chosen ministry team.

Last but not least remember it's not about money. Being a servant is not about money or reward. While it is nice to be recognized for our accomplishment, we don't serve others to receive praise or compensation. As servant leaders we prioritize the needs of others over our own. We are asked to be empathetic and encourage listening and sharing praise. A servant-leader shares power, puts the needs of others first and helps people develop and perform as highly as possible.

There is a lot to think about when it comes to being a leader. Servant Leadership should be considered the G.O.A.T of leadership styles, just as Simone Biles should be considered the G.O.A.T of gymnastics. Leadership should shine through when it matters the most.

Let's all aspire to be the 'Greatest Of All Time' in Jesus' eyes.

Let's pray:

A Servant's Prayer

Give me a servant's heart, O Lord;
A soul that longs for you,
A spirit that daily seeks your will,
And strength to follow through.

Give me ears to listen
To the cries that go unheard,
A mouth that speaks in kindness
And proclaims your perfect word.

Give me eyes to see the things
That grieve your only Son
And hands that reach out for the lost
Until your work is done.

Give me legs that carry me
Swiftly through the race,
And when I'm finished let me leave
Footprints marked with grace.

-Alicia Bruxvoort

Prayer Time

Give us opportunities this week to be a servant to others. Allow us to serve others the way You would. Thank You for Your grace that we are undeserving of, but You freely give us. Help us acknowledge You as our Holy God, full of goodness and mercy, as we watch You fulfill Your promises with confident expectancy. Help us listen to You, to hear You clearly and obey You completely, even when our journey doesn't go as smoothly or end as quickly as we expected. In Jesus' name, Amen".

Benediction

Matthew 22:37-40

Go into the world in peace. Love the Lord our God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind; and love your neighbor as yourself.