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 Second Sunday of Lent

Servanthood
Luke 22: 14-27

When the hour came, Jesus took his place at the table, and the apostles with him. ¹⁵ He said to them, “I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; ¹⁶ for I tell you, I will not eat it^[c] until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.” ¹⁷ Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he said, “Take this and divide it among yourselves; ¹⁸ for I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.” ¹⁹ Then he took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” ²⁰ And he did the same with the cup after supper, saying, “This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.^[d] ²¹ But see, the one who betrays me is with me, and his hand is on the table. ²² For the Son of Man is going as it has been determined, but woe to that one by whom he is betrayed!” ²³ Then they began to ask one another which one of them it could be who would do this.

The Dispute about Greatness

*²⁴ A dispute also arose among them as to which one of them was to be regarded as the **greatest**. ²⁵ But he said to them, “The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those in authority over them are called benefactors. ²⁶ But not so with you; rather the greatest among you must become like the **youngest**, and the leader like **one who serves**. ²⁷ For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one at the table? But I am among you as **one who serves**.*

The ***desire for GREATNESS*** is everywhere.

How often do we hear people talking about being great? Or greatest?

The best ever?

The world’s idea of greatness is simple—it’s about having more power, fame, money, accomplishment, and influence.

In today’s social media world, people are judged by how many friends, followers and likes they have online.

People who are making a name for themselves online are called ‘influencers’.

Similarly, ***COMPETITION is everywhere***.

We compete in sports, work, school, in our communities.

Rarely do you hear a story about someone who did ok at something, or was mediocre at a particular sport, or who came in last place, right?

Competition and this desire to be better, is ingrained in us from an early age. And if we are not striving to be better than other people, we might be caught up in a striving for *perfectionism*—trying to be the best, or perfect, as if that’s possible.

And the *CHURCH is not immune* from this desire for greatness or competition. Pastors call this the ABCs of church—
When we care way too much about **Attendance, Buildings, and Cash**.
Instead of focusing on how much we are serving, or reaching out, or welcoming the marginalized, we focus on numbers of people or resources.

All this striving to be great naturally leads to an *INWARD focus, a self-centered, me-first mentality*.
The exact opposite of ‘the mind of Christ’ that Paul urges us to have in Philippians 2:1-11.

Jesus’ own DISCIPLES were not immune to the pressures of greatness and competition.
They joined Jesus and his movement because God was calling them, but all throughout the Gospels they also seem to be searching for their own power and position in his movement.

If this desire to be greater and better is so ingrained in us, and our culture,
What can we do as Christians?
How can we escape the me-first mindset?
How can we embrace servanthood?
Or as one pastor put it how can we embrace *TRUE greatness, ‘insignificant’ greatness?*

First, I think we have to *look at Jesus’ words* in the Gospels, here and elsewhere. This is not the only time that the disciples are arguing about who is greater. In Matthew 18:1-5 the disciples actually ask Jesus who is the greatest among them! *the disciples came to Jesus and asked, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?”* ² *He called a child, whom he put among them,* ³ *and said, “Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.* ⁴ *Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.*
Jesus corrects their idea of greatness by calling up a child—someone who had no power or status or worth in the society at that time!

Similarly in Mark 9:33-37, right after Jesus tells them he must suffer and die, they are arguing about who is the greatest as they walk, and Jesus says:

*“Whoever wants to be first must be **last of all and servant of all.**”*³⁶ Then he took a little child ...and said to them,³⁷ *“Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me...*

The same story is found in Luke 9:46-48. Jesus says:

*“Whoever welcomes **this child** in my name welcomes me...for the least among all of you is the greatest.”*

But our passage in *Luke 22 is perhaps the most striking* when it comes to arguing about who is greater.

For they are celebrating the Passover meal when they are arguing.

Passover was a meal to commemorate the Exodus from Egypt, and the time when Hebrew families put the blood of the lamb over their doorposts, so the angel of death would pass over them when that 10th and final plague came to Pharaoh and Egypt.

It was after that plague that Pharaoh finally freed the people.

And here, in that Passover meal,

Jesus offers *himself as the Passover lamb and sacrifice*, offering his own body and blood to his disciples.

It was probably bizarre to witness that, much less understand it.

It makes sense to us today as we take communion,

but at the time it would have been lost on the disciples.

Clearly they didn't understand this self-sacrificing gift,

because they immediately started arguing about their own greatness!

And that's when Jesus says:

*the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like **one who serves**I am among you as one who serves.*

Jesus offers HIMSELF as the example of servanthood.

Of a new mind-set, a new attitude, a new way of life.

The way of humble service.

So what can we do to embrace *his NEW IDEA of greatness?*

Well, what if we need to *get HONEST* with ourselves?

I mean, none of us is immune to a spirit of competition or perfectionism or selfishness.

We *ALL want to be important*, in one way or another.
 If not to prove ourselves to others,
 then maybe to prove ourselves to our own hearts, or to God.

One Christian blogger writes:

*We desperately seek to be significant. In times like these – when it’s easier and more alluring than ever to be or feel important – Christians must remember that we’re not called to be viral superstars, we’re called to be **living sacrifices**. We’re not instructed to make ourselves look as good as possible in front of the largest audience we can; no, we are instructed to **deny ourselves and humbly follow Christ**.* (www.kenotic.net; 1-22-09).

What if **TRUE GREATNESS** was **NOT about**
 power, influence, money, fame, or accomplishment,
 but instead was about
Sharing, caring, loving, and serving?

What if greatness was **NOT ABOUT** being first, or best, or better,
 But about being **last, least, and a follower?**

What if **greatness could be characterized** by vulnerability, and weakness,
 By service, sacrifice, and humility?
 What would the world look like then?

You know, we are seeing such **examples of greatness in UKRAINE** right now—
 In their own President Zelensky, who is urging his people to sacrifice their own
 lives to defend their freedom.

We are seeing ordinary people become heroes,
 taking women and children to safety, helping the injured, even burying the dead.
 They are not looking out for themselves, but for one another, for the greater good.
 And they are willing to die for one another.

Although we **struggle with the sin of pride and a me-first mindset**,
 Many of us are **drawn to examples of humility**, aren’t we?
 Think of **Ghandi**, or **Mother Teresa**.

Think about **Pope Francis**.

Instead of living in the opulent papal apartments,
 Francis opted to live in a Vatican residence alongside visiting clergy and lay
 people. He eats with everyone else.

A day after being chosen pope, he returned to his guest house, thanked the staff - and personally paid the bill. He is known to carry his own luggage, he has personally washed the feet of fellow believers as part of worship. He asks people to call him Francis. He spends time with the poor. Once, he invited 200 homeless people to dinner at the Vatican; afterward, he gave each a gift pack with pastries, fresh fruit and a rosary.

<https://www.dallasnews.com/opinion/commentary/2013/07/31/pope-francis-acts-of-humility>

Think about *humble people in your own life*.

Aren't they inspiring to you?

I have an Aunt who is always helping and serving others, always giving, not trying to take credit, or be recognized for her service.

We are by nature **PRONE TO PRIDE**
and yet **DRAWN to these examples of humility**.
Why?

Maybe it's because humility is the *very NATURE of God*,
The *essence of Jesus*.
And we are made in the image of God,
And called to follow Jesus.

But following the way of servanthood,
without the need for recognition or appreciation—is not easy, is it?
We are PROUD people.

Over the history of the church, **PRIDE has been considered the greatest of sins**,
Because it is the **root** of all other sins,
It's when we put ourselves in the place of God.
It takes us away from following God.

In *Mere Christianity* C. S. Lewis said,
*According to Christian teachers, the essential vice, the utmost evil, is Pride. Unchastity, anger, greed, drunkenness, and all that, are mere flea bites in comparison: it was through Pride that the devil became the devil: Pride leads to every other vice: it is the complete anti-God state of mind...
... it is Pride which has been the chief cause of misery in every nation and every family since the world began.*

Because we struggle with pride, *we NEED humility.*

Thomas Tarrants of the C.S. Lewis Institute says that: *Truly, **humility is our greatest friend.** It increases our hunger for God's word and opens our hearts to his Spirit. It leads to intimacy with God, who knows the proud from afar, but dwells with him "who is of a contrite and lowly spirit" (Isa. 57:15). It is a sign of greatness in the kingdom of God (Luke 22:24–27).*

*Developing the identity, attitude, and conduct of a humble servant does not happen overnight. It is rather like **peeling an onion**: you cut away one layer only to find another beneath it. But it does happen. As we forsake pride and seek to humble by daily deliberate choices in dependence on the Holy Spirit, humility grows in our souls. ...it is the **work of a lifetime** ...it is a grace that is precious in the sight of God, who in due course will exalt all who embrace it.*

Knowing and Doing Winter 2011 **Pride and Humility**, by Thomas A. Tarrants, III, D.Min.

Humility is our ultimate calling.

But sometimes people are *confused by the concept of humility.*

Humility is not so much thinking less of yourself,

But rather, thinking about yourself less.

The difference is important.

Sometimes women especially are taught to always put their needs last.

To serve others first, and forget completely about self.

But the ***Great Commandment*** is to love others *as we love ourselves.*

Which means, we have to love ourselves,

And to know God's love for us, in order to truly love anyone else.

So we can't forget that.

True humility is *not about denigrating ourselves,*

But *allowing God's image to shine* through us!

True humility is *letting go of pride,*

So that we can *follow* in the footsteps of Jesus.

This isn't easy, is it?

Most people think pretty highly of themselves.

Psychologists even have a term for it: "illusory superiority."

It simply means that we tend to inflate our positive qualities and abilities, in comparison to other people.

Numerous research studies have revealed this tendency to *overestimate ourselves.*

And we all have what Pastor James Harnish calls a ‘**me-first**’ mindset. He says: *You know you have it if you can relate to any of the following: you took the last piece of pie, the last slice of cake while no one was looking. You pulled into the parking space the guy had been waiting for, for 5 minutes with his turn signal on. You passed along some gossip to make you look better. You accepted credit for someone else’s hard work. You gave a gift that was something you really wanted for yourself. . . .* (*Living with the Mind of Christ*, by James Harnish, Abingdon: Nashville: 2005, g. 19)

So, what can we do? Where is our *hope*?
Is it possible to set aside pride and lead a life worthy of Christ?
Of course—because *with God all things are possible*.

It all starts by *UNDERSTANDING what Jesus did for us*,
So that we can live differently.

In our verse for this Lenten season, Philippians 2:1-11, it says,
Jesus Christ, though he was God, emptied himself, becoming a servant. . . .

That phrase ‘*though*’ can also be translated ‘*being*’ or ‘*because*’.
Because he was God he chose to serve.
Now think about that for a minute.
The Almighty God, Jesus,
chose to serve, not be served.

What Jesus did—is **WHO GOD IS**.
When Jesus humbled and sacrificed himself all the way to the cross
That was *God’s true nature--*self-giving, self-sacrificing love.
Our God is a **SERVANT**.
Our Savior Jesus emptied himself like a *servant*.

Our God is also the ultimate **GIVER**.
In Luke 22 before the disciples start ridiculously arguing over who is greatest,
Jesus *gives* his own body and blood in the Passover meal!

We are called to follow Him—
The One who *serves and gives*.
When in doubt about what to do, we should be *servants*.
When in doubt about what we own, we should *give*.
For our God serves and gives—to save us.
To Serve and Give, is the life of servanthood.

And *servanthood is the path to true JOY.*

Paul says this in Philippians 2:2. He says

make my JOY complete: be of the same mind, having the same love...Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit.....Let the same mind be in you that was^[a] in Christ Jesus, who emptied himself...

The famous humanitarian Albert Schweitzer said, “*the only ones among you who will really be **happy** are those who have sought and found **how to serve**”*

Friends, let us seek THAT joy. It's the Good News of the Gospel!

The joy of servanthood.

The path of humility.

The way of serving and giving.

And for this joyful way of life, all God's people can say together, Amen.