

## ***“The Greatest of All”***

As the disciples of Jesus walked along the road, they argued about “who was the greatest.” We’re not told what they decided – but we know how the world would answer. The “greatest” is the one on top of the hill – at the front of the line – with the biggest church, the most toys, the deciding vote – the one with the most power.

Who is “the greatest”? It must be between Peter, James and John – after all, they were just with Jesus on the Mountain of Transfiguration – they were the only ones who had just seen Moses and Elijah with their very own eyes. They get more attention than any of the other disciples.

The great irony is that this argument takes place as Jesus is teaching them that He “is going to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill Him. And when [the Son of Man] is killed, after three days He will rise.”

Jesus is going to suffer and die – and His followers can only argue about who is the greatest.

The Twelve disciples were not the first, nor the last, to have this argument. St. James writes to Christians amongst whom there is “bitter jealousy and selfish ambition ... quarrels and fights ... [who] desire and do not have, so [they] murder.”

It’s no different for us as we walk along the road of life. We’re consumed with “who is the greatest” – and constantly comparing ourselves to one another. We feel compelled to let others know of our greatest qualities and achievements – we tout our service to God and family and nation – as if we are campaigning to be “the greatest.”

Jesus doesn’t interrupt the disciples as they walk along the road – as they’re having their argument. Instead, He waits to teach them what it means that He will be delivered over, killed, and be raised to life again.

If they – AND WE – are to understand what it means to be great (in the kingdom of God, not in the eyes of the world) – then we must understand what happens to Jesus, the Son of Man.

Jesus, the Son of Man, is first – because He is eternal. He is first, because all things were created through Him. He is first, because He has authority over all things. And He who is FIRST, becomes LAST of all.

Jesus, the Son of God, takes on human flesh and blood to become the Servant of all mankind. He serves by being handed over and crucified for sinners. He who is innocent, and holy, becomes The Sinner – and trusts that the Father will raise Him on the third day.

This is the “wisdom that comes down from above” – but the disciples follow the wisdom of the world. We also, do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men – walking in the ways of the world, promoting ourselves – allocating our time, energy, money, and love, in service of ourselves – scrapping and fighting to be “the greatest.”

Jesus is unbelievably patient with them, and with us. He takes a child in His arms to teach us the way of God. Jesus takes those who are last in the eyes of the world – those who cannot help themselves, who have no voice – those who have no standing with God or man – and He puts them front and center, making them first in His kingdom.

First, though they’ve done nothing to deserve it. First, though they contribute nothing, and require everything. First, though they are weak, and dependent.

Dearly beloved, we must repent of being independent Christians – relying on our strength and wisdom to get us by – promoting our value to the kingdom – making ourselves first, and the greatest, in order to be served by all.

Such a person does not need the Son of Man to be handed over and crucified. Such a person does not need the Resurrected One to resurrect their body on the Last Day. Such a one does not follow Jesus in the way that leads to life eternal.

To the world, the Jesus of our text is weak, a loser – and to follow Him is foolish. Our quest to be the greatest is proof that His ways are not our ways – that denial and the sacrifice of ourselves is the farthest thing from our minds.

And that is exactly why Jesus humbled Himself to be born of a Virgin – humbled Himself and became obedient to death, even death upon a cross – to serve, and to save proud sinners like us.

Today, Jesus takes the repentant, humble, dependent sinner in His arms – and exalts him by His grace. His blood cleanses the stain of our sin, pays our debt in full, and releases us from our selfish captivity.

He receives us to His Table, so that we might receive Him who is First – but became Last, and Servant of all – so that we might be called great in His kingdom. Which is to say – one who is nothing, but trusts in Christ for everything – one who is but a child, but is exalted to live and reign with Jesus Christ – now, and forevermore. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guards your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.