

McCabe United Methodist Church
“Aiming to Be Last!”
Mark 9:30-37: November 2 & 3, 2013
Pastor Rick Fossum

“Ok,” Jesus asked, **“what were you arguing about?”**

Do you remember the story? Jesus was with his disciples. They were alone. It was one of those teaching moments where Jesus was the teacher and the disciples were the learners.

For the second time, Jesus explained to them that he was going to be betrayed, arrested, killed and three days later, he would rise again. Twice he told this to his disciples, but they still didn't get it.

Granted, those early disciples would never be accused of being the brightest bulbs in the lamp, but two times!

I think I know *‘why’* they didn't get it. While Jesus was busy teaching them, they weren't paying attention. Poor Jesus was talking to himself! The disciples, according to the Bible, were having a heated argument. Can you guess what they were arguing about? They were arguing about who was the greatest disciple.

“Jesus, likes me best!” “Does not!” “Does to!” “Does not!”

No wonder they didn't hear Jesus! They were too busy arguing! Have you ever heard an argument like that? Maybe you've been in one?

“My dog is better than your dog.”

“My school is better than your school.”

“My church is better than your church.”

Greatness, according to the disciples, was one thing while greatness according to Jesus was another, different thing.

For the disciples, greatness had to do with accomplishments. Who was the fastest? Who was the richest? Who was the smartest? Who was the strongest?

It's basic 101 stuff. It's how we measure greatness today.

When the U.S. started its Apollo space program to put a person on the moon, our motivations were not entirely scientific. In fact, if you remember your history, the

space race was driven mostly by ego. Our ego and the ego of the Soviet Union.

At the time, in the early 1960s, the Soviets were ahead of us when it came to space exploration. They were the first to launch a satellite into space. They were the first to put a living creature, a monkey, into space.

We didn't like it. Our country was tired of coming in second to the Soviet space program and so we decided to do something about it. It's called ego.

On July 20, 1969, with great pride, the American people watched and listened as Neil Armstrong stepped out of the Lunar module with Buzz Aldrin and spoke these famous words: **"That's one small step for man . . . One giant leap for mankind."** We were first! Finally, our space program was the greatest!

By the way, did you know that there's been ten other astronauts who have walked on the surface of the moon since Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin's historic Apollo mission? Can you name any of their names? Probably not because they weren't the first.

For many of us, there's no glory in being second or third.

Jesus saw greatness in a different way. For Jesus, it didn't matter if you took first place or second or third or last. Actually, he encouraged last place. He looked at his disciples and he said to them, **"Whoever wants to be first must be last and a servant of all."**

"Aim to be last, boys," Jesus told his disciples. **"I didn't choose you because you were the best fishermen on the lake. I certainly didn't choose you because you were smarter than most or stronger. I choose you because I want you to follow me."**

Two Texans were trying to impress each other with the size of their ranches. The one rancher asked the other, **"What's the name of your ranch?"**

He replied, **"The name of my ranch is the Big Sky, Flying Big Bird, Really Big Cows, Big Mountain Pass, Great Meadows Galore, Golden Spur and Big Bill's Really Big Ranch."**

"Wow," the other rancher said. **"That's some name. How many head of cattle do you run?"**

"Not many," the rancher sadly replied. **"Very few survive the branding."**

The size of someone's ranch wasn't important to Jesus and neither was who was the fastest or smartest or richest. Jesus had a different definition of greatness. Jesus said, **"Whoever wants to be first must be last and a servant of all."**

In other words, **"Aim to be last!"**

I don't think he was telling his disciples to shoot for being average or mediocre. I don't think he was telling them to let other people walk all over them.

He was talking about humility. He was talking about putting others first. He was talking about doing the best you can, even if you're not the best or the greatest. Do the best you can..

In 1972, Cathy Rigby was the one, big hope of our U.S. Gymnastics Team in the Olympic Games in Munich, Germany. She had one goal in mind . . . winning the gold medal.

If you remember her story, she did well, but not well enough to win the gold. She was crushed. When she was finished her events, she joined her parents in the arena that night and she told them, **"I'm sorry. I did my best."**

Her mother looked at her daughter, hugged her and said these ten profound words: **"doing your best is more important than being the best."**

This is what Jesus was saying. **"Don't worry about your own importance or your own greatness. Be humble. Put others first. Do your best. And remember, true greatness comes from God."**

There's a lesson here for everybody. If you're a young person, its do your best. Do you play a musical instrument? Are you involved in athletics? Are you in school? **"Do your best."**

If you're older than a young person, the lesson is the same. Life isn't about being better than the next person. It's not about having the most toys or the biggest check books. It's about taking what we have and doing our best with it.

For me, it's never been my goal to be the best or great pastor. If I can say to God at the end of the day, **"Lord, I've done my best,"** this is all the approval I need.

For McCabe, our goal isn't to be the greatest church in the conference or in the district or even in Bismarck. Our goal is simply to ask God to help us be a better church today than we were yesterday and a better church tomorrow than we are today.

For us, this means doing our best. It means relying on people like all of you to help us be the church we are intended to be, nothing more and nothing less.

The writer, Alex Haley, has a picture of a turtle sitting on top of a fence post hanging in his office. He said that the picture reminds him of a valuable lesson. If you see a turtle sitting on a fence post, you know he had some help getting there. Haley said that anytime he starts to think, "**Wow! I'm really good. My books are great,**" he looks at the picture and remembers that like the turtle he had help getting there.

"Whoever wants to be first must be last and a servant of all"

Being the last is how Jesus lived his life. He put others first. He helped others even if it meant dying a cross.

This is the lesson he taught his followers 2,000 years ago and it's still the lesson he teaches us today. "**Whoever wants to be first must be last and a servant of all.**"

It's a hard path to follow, but for Jesus and his followers, it's a path that leads to greatness.