

9-20-09 Jeremiah 11:18-20; James 3:13-4:3, 4:7-8a; Psalm 54; Mark 9:30-37

Let us pray. May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts and minds be acceptable onto you, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

*Little boy and a baseball bat
Stands in the field with his ball and bat
Says "I am the greatest player of them all"
Put his bat on his shoulder and he tosses up the ball*

*And the ball goes up and the ball comes down
Swings his bat all the way around
The world's so still he can hear the sound
The baseball falls to the ground*

*Now the little boy doesn't say a word
Picks up his ball he is undeterred
Says "I am the greatest there has ever been"
And he grits his teeth and he tries it again*

*And the ball goes up and the ball comes down
Swings his bat all the way around
The world's so still he can hear the sound
The baseball falls to the ground*

*He makes no excuses he shows no fear
He just closes his eyes and listens to the cheers. . .*

Who is the greatest? Who hasn't asked that question or wondered about it. If anyone is involved in sports as a participant or a spectator – it's about who wins, who's the best. It's easy to get caught up in the competition and then it bleeds over into the rest of our lives – who has the greatest home? Vehicle? The best toys? It doesn't seem to end.

Then again, who doesn't want to be remembered as "the greatest" at something? Good or bad, if you're the greatest, you are remembered – Herod the Great, Alexander the Great, Catherine the Great (can you imagine having "the Great" be a part of your name?); the Great Depression, WWI – the Great War. These are the people/events that are remembered in history

Who is the greatest? The disciples argued about it, yet when Jesus asked them what they were arguing about on the way, they grew silent. They probably didn't want Jesus to hear their debate – I mean, it's a bit embarrassing. Maybe it seems to be an okay argument until Jesus wants to know. Then, they realize just how silly they are. Who's the greatest? It's like asking who's the most spiritual! Who prays the most/the best? Who reads/knows Scripture the best? Who's the best church-goer? Who's most like Jesus?

When you start asking the question, “Who’s the greatest” you can’t help but ask the opposite, “Who’s the worst?” Who never comes to church enough times? Whose kids are the worst during worship? Who forgets the most when they sign-up to volunteer? Who can’t pay their bills? Who can’t find work? That question can go on and on as well.

Jesus brought the disciples to silence when he asked them what they were arguing about and then he changes things up, like he always seems to do, and redefines “greatness.”

“Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all.” That’s NOT what the disciples were thinking greatness was about and that’s NOT what we usually think of as greatness. Acting like that is NOT going to get our names written down in the history books. In fact, no one will even know what we did! Jesus continues, “Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.” The word for “child” in this passage could also mean servant. Either way, Jesus is talking about someone without status (servant and child) in society. Whoever receives a servant receives the master. Whoever receives a child receives Jesus/God. (idea, Jim Mueller, textweek.com)

That’s the kind of greatness Jesus seeks from those who follow him!

Who’s the greatest? Of course, we should be silent when that question is asked because none of us can claim to be the greatest. We are the worst, the worst sinners of all. And yet, we are not forgotten. And yet, we can be called great because Christ has made us great! Only through the gifts of love and forgiveness given to us freely by Christ can we be great! It is out of God’s greatness that we are able to reach out as servants of all!

Sometimes, redefining greatness is what encourages us to go out into the world with Christ’s love.

*Little boy he adjusts his hat
Picks up his ball stares at his bat
Says “I am the greatest the game is on the line”
And he gives his all one last time*

*And the ball goes up when the moon’s so bright
Swings his bat with all his might
And the world’s so still as still as can be
And the baseball falls and that’s strike three*

*Now it’s supertime and his mama calls
Little boy starts home with his bat and ball
Says “I am the greatest that is a fact,
But even I didn’t know I could pitch like that”*

*Says “I am the greatest that is understood,
But even I didn’t know I could pitch that good.”* (Song “I Am the Greatest” by Kenny Rogers)