

They left that place and passed through Galilee. Jesus did not want anyone to know where they were,<sup>31</sup> because he was teaching his disciples. He said to them, “The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. They will kill him, and after three days he will rise.”<sup>32</sup> But they did not understand what he meant and were afraid to ask him about it.

<sup>33</sup> They came to Capernaum. When he was in the house, he asked them, “What were you arguing about on the road?”<sup>34</sup> But they kept quiet because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest.

<sup>35</sup> Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, “If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all.”

<sup>36</sup> He took a little child and had him stand among them. Taking him in his arms, he said to them,<sup>37</sup> “Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me.” (NIV84)

Theme: Follow Christ’s humility.

1. He humbled himself to the point of death.
2. He humbly cares of the least.

To say the least, Muhammad Ali was a confident guy. Once, after a big victory he ran around the ring shouting: “I am the Greatest! I shook up the World.” You may know that Muhammad Ali was quite fond of telling people how great he was. He is also quoted as saying: “I’m not the greatest; I’m the double greatest.” And, “I am the greatest, I said that even before I knew I was.” As good as a boxer as Ali was, he still lost 5 times—so he wasn’t always the greatest.

The disciples in our gospel today thought they were great too. In fact they argued about which one of them was the greatest. We have the tendency to think that we are pretty great as well. We like to brag about what we have done. But being a Christian is not about how great you are, but about how great Christ is. Christ is great because of his humility, his humility which we strive to follow. For he humbled himself to the point of death, and he humbly cares for the least of us.

Jesus’ ministry was winding down. Soon he would be facing trial in front of the Sanhedrin. Time was running out to teach his disciples. So he began telling them what would happen to him during Holy

Week. **The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. They will kill him, and after three days he will rise.** When Jesus called himself the Son of Man he was referring to Daniel seven. There is Daniel seven the Son of Man is clearly God. So when Jesus refers to himself as the Son of Man, he is calling himself God. And look at what will happen to this Son of Man—or God: he will be killed. God will be betrayed and then murdered. God will die. That is the ultimate example of humility. The Almighty, all-powerful God will die. And die willingly. As God, he could have stopped them. He could have decided that he didn’t want to do it and walked away and the Jews and Romans would have been powerless to stop him. But he didn’t. He knew he was going to suffer and die, yet he willingly let it happen. He did this because he knew that by suffering and dying he would take all our sins upon himself and suffer through hell so we wouldn’t have to. He did this because he also knew that he would rise from the dead to give all believers eternal life.

This wasn’t the first time Jesus told his disciples about this. It was at least the third time. But the disciples didn’t really care—and they didn’t understand. So out of embarrassment they kept their mouths shut. Why would Jesus be talking about his anyway? Why would Jesus talk about how he was going to die? Last week when we read about Jesus telling his disciples about his death Peter rebuked him. Peter and the disciples didn’t understand then, and they still didn’t. They didn’t want to think about Jesus dying. And quickly their minds turned to something else. They began to talk about who was the greatest. Here Jesus was telling them how God would humble himself to the point of dying for sinners, and all they could do argue. Argue about which one of them is better than the others. Perhaps it was because Jesus had just taken three of them to the top of a mountain to see him transform while talking to Moses and Elijah. And Peter, James, and John began to brag about how they must be better or greater because they were given a special privilege. So they began to argue about which one of them was the greatest. And they completely ignored Christ’s greatness.

We are that way too, by nature. We want to be the best. When we take a test, we want to know what other people got and how many

people we did better than. We always strive to look the best. We look at sports stats so we can see who the best player is. We vote and cheer for those who we think is the best athlete, singer, or dancer. The world teaches us to love ourselves because we are special. Kids are told that they are great. That they can be the best at anything if they put their mind to it and try their hardest. We live in the culture today that loves to boast about their own accomplishments. When they do something spectacular they make a big scene and make it known to everyone so we can applaud them for being so great. Like the rest of the world, we too want to be considered great.

There is one major problem with this: we aren't that great. Despite what you think and what the world says you should think, you aren't anything special. You are not as good as you think you are—you are far from great. You are just like everyone else. You're a sinner. And you can't save yourself. There is nothing you can do to save yourself. You can try as hard as you like and be the greatest person you can be—but you still can't impress God. You still fall short of what he demands of you. And because you are not great or perfect you deserve eternal damnation.

You may not be great, but Christ is. He is great because he humbled himself so that we can be made great. Through Christ, when God looks at us he does not see sinners. He does not see those who deserve eternal damnation. He sees those who have been made pure through his Son. He sees his children who will live with him forever. So as Christians we point out what we truly are—not great, but damnable sinners. We admit what we are to show how great Christ is. And we humbly admit along with Paul, **Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst.**

Through his willing suffering and death, Christ showed us the ultimate example of humility. It is this humility that we strive to follow. It is his humility that leads us to care for others.

We are Christians know we are to be humble. And we strive to follow Christ's humility. And we often think we are doing a pretty good job. We understand we are sinners. We try not to brag about ourselves. We don't look at ourselves at the greatest at anything. We think we are doing a great job of being humble. We end up being living

embodiments of the old joke: "I'm the most humble person in the world." We may not think too highly of ourselves when it comes to our gifts and abilities. But when it comes to keeping God's Word we often fail to realize how great our sins are.

The more we know about what it means to be humble, the more we realize that we are not. The more we strive, the more we understand we have a long way to go. And leads us to humble ourselves even more. But we have to fight our sinful nature all along the way. Our sinful nature is prideful and arrogant. It wants attention; it wants to be recognized. We all want our ego to be stroked every once in a while. We desperately want to be praised by someone for something. So we beat down our sinful nature. We put aside our wants and desires to be praised and willingly serve others.

This is the message that Jesus wanted to get across to his disciples. He said to them, **If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all.** We become the first, by being the least. The less we consider ourselves to be, the greater we actually are. The more we put ourselves and our wants and desires behind those of others, the more God thinks of us. He says if we want to be considered great, then we should be the servant of others. So we willingly serve others. We don't have to be pushed into it or prodded. We don't look for anything in return. But we help out when and where we are needed. We willingly put aside our wants and desires to serve others. As an example of what it means to serve others, Jesus took a little child. He stood in the middle of the disciples. And picked him up. And said, **Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me.** Taking care of children is often not considered a high-end job. It is one that people look upon with envy. It's cleaning up puke. It's changing diapers. It's giving baths, forcing them to eat. It's staying up late and waking up early. It's trying to teach someone to read, write, and so on. It's trying to teach someone who has the attention span of a 2-year old!

It is an unsung job. And yet there are some who willingly serve young children. And they love it. They don't do it for the money. They don't do it for the praise. They do it so they can serve others.

Although it may not always be pleasant, and most of the time it is tiring, they realize it is necessary. When we receive little children in the Lord's name we not only care for their physical care, but also their spiritual care. That means we share God's Word with them. We teach them about Christ and everything he has done for us. And that makes their work not the lowest of the low, but the most important work of all. Being in charge of the spiritual lives of others, kids, elderly, and others is the type of work that is the highest in the kingdom of God. So they sacrifice their time, their talents, and themselves, for the sake of others. They do it for the sake of others who may not even realize it or appreciate it.

They do it for Christ. They do it through faith in him. They do it out of love and thanks for him. For he humbled himself to serve us—and we are truly the lowest. Only Christians can have this attitude. Only believers can be humble as Christ is humble. Only believers can serve others in Christ—that is in faith in him. Unbelievers may do the same thing as believers, but they don't do it for Christ, therefore it's not done in the form of a true servant.

When Christians serve others in Christ, God is pleased with them. We not only have Christ. But we also have the Father. That is, they rule our hearts through faith. Those who serve others may not be the greatest in the eyes of man. But it is a great job in the eyes of God. They may seem lowly. But they are great in the eyes of God.

God loves the Grade School teachers, the Sunday School teachers, and others who take care of young kids. He loves the parents, grandparents, and guardians. He loves all believers who serve others. They make themselves humble. Their lives are not about themselves, but about Christ. And so Christ lifts them up. Christ makes them great. And we willingly serve others.

The world acts like Mohammed Ali. Everyone thinks that they are the greatest. The world and our sinful nature pushes us to think the same. We want to be the best and we want others to give us praise because of it. But the fact is that we aren't that great. We sin, we fall, we deserve punishment. But there is one who is great—Christ. He humbled himself to make us great. So we willingly follow in his humble steps. We put aside our desires and serve others in the name of Christ. For

he humbled himself to the point of death so we could be great forever. Amen.