

8 November 2017
Pentecost 22 Midweek

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Greenspring Village, Springfield, VA

Jesu Juva

“The Greatest Among You . . .”
Text: Matthew 23:1-12

The greatest among you shall be your servant.

If you ask me to tell you who I think is great among us, my answer would be those ladies who take care of my father and the other residents in the memory care where he lives. They don't get any press or publicity; no one outside a small circle of people knows who they are. I don't know how much they get paid, but I know it's not enough for what they do. They feed, bathe, clean up after, launder, lift, and encourage. For all this they often get yelled at, called names, and maybe even spit on. But they smile with grace, they forgive without limit, and they have mercy through it all. I marvel at them. And I am embarrassed for myself, for I am often not as patient as they are, often do not forgive as they do, and often do not show the compassion they show day after day. They must go home exhausted. But then they show up again the next day and do it all again.

The greatest among you shall be your servant.

But those ladies aren't considered great by the world. For the world considers those great who are well-educated and with advanced degrees. Those who have high positions, who wield power, work in sterile corner offices, are well-paid, with big houses and fancy cars, and have people working for them. Those who do really important things . . . not caring for a bunch of forgetful old people.

People like the scribes and Pharisees. They were well-educated and had important positions - they were the teachers of Israel. They had fancy and impressive clothes, got the places of honor at feasts and the best seats at church, and had honorable titles which they liked to be called and wore with pride. When they walked down the street, you noticed them; you knew who they were. And they knew that you knew who they were. And they liked it that way.

Two very, very different views of greatness, to say the least.

The greatest among you shall be your servant.

When Jesus spoke those words, those who considered themselves great wouldn't have scoffed, I don't think, as much as pictured in their heads a great fall. A great fall from greatness to service. From honor to shame. From the top to the bottom. A scandal maybe;

or a great misfortune. And they probably thought: that won't be me. I won't let that be me.

But Jesus wasn't talking about them; **He was talking about Himself.** Because He was the greatest among them - He was the Almighty God in human flesh! And He had come to be their servant. To give them His very self. And this wasn't a great fall - this is exactly what Jesus wanted to do. To come and serve the least and the lowest. The ordinary folks that nobody knows, the notorious sinners that *everybody* knows, the forgetful old people, the insignificant children that His own disciples tried to chase away, the lepers and Samaritans who were considered less-than-human by some, and those everybody thought God was punishing with some terrible disease or disability. Jesus came and hung out with them, and served them, mercied them, cared for them, cleaned them, forgave them, and loved them.

And then He did this too: He died for them. Went all the way to the cross for them. And the great ones who walked by mocked at Him up there, all filthy and disgusting, helpless and in pain. They were satisfied, for the great ones were still great, those who weren't still weren't, and Jesus . . . well, they didn't have to worry about Him anymore. They'd go home to their nice houses, tables full of food, and soft beds, and Jesus would get laid in a cold, hard, dark tomb. And tomorrow, everything would be back to normal.

Except they didn't know this: that the day after that, nothing would be the same again. For the one who humbled Himself all the way to the death of the cross, after a day of rest in the tomb, would be exalted. He would rise from that cold, hard, dark tomb back to life again. Not to stop serving, or because He was done serving, but to serve even more! And give His very self more. And to send out His apostles to be the same kind of great and do the same kind of serving. So that His mercy, love, forgiveness, and care be spread throughout the whole world. To all people in every place, no matter how high or low, great or small, young or old or forgetful.

For the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many (Matthew 20:28). Yes, ***the greatest among you shall be your servant***, and He still is. Still serving, still giving His life to a world full of people in need of life. For though our minds may go and our memories grow forgetful, His never does. Jesus never forgets you and will never stop doing everything He can to make sure that when the day comes that you are laid in your cold, hard, dark grave, that will not be the end for you, but the day of your exaltation with Him to greatness in the kingdom of heaven. He died for you who die, so that you may rise and live with Him who rose and lives for you. Now and forever.

So, ***the greatest among you shall be your servant***. And He serves to make you great. Greatly mercied, greatly forgiven, greatly loved.

And now we can do the same. For when the greatest one serves you and serves you still, to make you great, then we can so do for others and serve them the same. That they be great, too. For you are, and they are, in your Saviour's eyes.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.