

WELCOME 25th FEBRUARY 2024 – 2ND SUNDAY IN LENT '24 B

Psalm 25:1-7 & Mark 9:30-37

Welcome! It's great to be together again today! Along with your worship order you have **Growing Praise** inserts & **Bible Study Qs** that are able to lead you deeper into God's word/work in your life & help you share that w/ someone else. We also use them for our **Zoom Bible Study Catch-ups on Friday @ 1p.m.**

As we move into this week... "Best actor" ...**Olympic** Gold Medalist... **Wimbledon** Champion...**Order** of Australia Medal. Those accolades & others like them get etched in memory & on trophies...The also-rans, not so much. We don't well remember the ones who faltered in the 1st round, finished in the middle of the pack or got an honourable mention...

In real life, "participation ribbons" don't garner a lot of applause. In a world organized around success, it's hard to hear & embrace...

"Whoever wants to be first must take last place & be the servant of everyone else."

Living the way of Jesus is about living how Jesus lived...Living how he would deal w/ people & circumstances in your life as if he was you. Living the way of Jesus is about living according to who you are as beloved child of God in whom God delights

NB: Jesus did not consider his status as the Son of God something to be used to his own advantage (Php 2:5-11). Instead, he used his life to serve others in humble obedience to the will of the Father, even to the point of death on the cross for us.

Jesus only ever issued one call...**Follow me**...Discipleship is to walk w/ Jesus such that all we are is absorbed in him...focused on him...directed by him...where you trust **HIS WORD** about God & about you to determine your identity & shape your life & where you walk **HIS WAY** everywhere you are every day you live.

Make your ways known to me, O Lord; point out the road for me to follow.

Lead me by your truth and teach me, for you are the God who saves me.

All day long I put my hope in you.

Let's pray & then together live God's Word...

PRAYER OF THE DAY:

Heavenly Father...again today move in the thunderous power of your Spirit to reclaim & recreate us. Let nothing stand between us & obedience to your will. Remove every obstacle & excuse so that all that remains of us is your new creation & the joy of heaven as our lives reflect your glory your presence & your life-saving love...Through Jesus Christ...Amen.

Let's hear & put our hearts into God's Word...

FAITH CHAT:

1. What does "greatness" look like in today's world?
2. What does "greatness" look like in Wagga Wagga?

2ND SUNDAY IN LENT '24 B – DISCIPLESHIP BEGINS WITH A “W”: WAY

“2nd place, is just the first place loser.” Attributed to NASCAR Champion, Dale Earnhardt, legendary driver of Car #3...that attitude is embraced by sports stars, pop stars, business tycoons, soccer parents...and more...world over. I first heard it from Olympic Sprinter Michael Johnson...but I’m sure something similar was said down at the touch carnival last weekend. It’s true for a lot of folks. Our world is built around & to the benefit of the successful...the winners...1st place.

Which is why what we read this morning is so jarring...“After they (Jesus & the 12) arrived at Capernaum & settled in a house, Jesus asked his disciples, “What were you discussing out on the road?” But they didn’t answer, because they had been arguing about which of them was the greatest.” How does that argument even start? How do you think it sounded? What on God’s green earth *is* “the greatest disciple”? How would you know? Is there a vote? Yellow Jersey like Tour de France? I can’t even imagine... Except I can...We live in a world where “greatness” is a thing. It’s the ticket to power, control, wealth, fame, reputation, status, & position. 2nd place finishers don’t typically do a big dance to celebrate. Can you imagine a political campaign built around, “Vote for me I want to: ‘Make Australia Last of All!’” Muhammad Ali’s career would have been very different if he had called himself “The Leastest.”

One of the young men from our church in Nth Tx played professional baseball. For about 6-7 years he played for the San Francisco Giants on the same team with a guy named Barry Bonds. You don’t need to know anything about US baseball... Bonds was a superstar...franchise player...millions of \$\$ in guaranteed contract money & records of all kinds. People always asked Daniel what it was like playing on the same team w/ BB. He said he didn’t really know. BB never talked to anyone else. Had his own training schedule & his own wing of the training rooms. Showed up for every game but spent very little time w/ the rest of the team except for one/two guys he’d known for a while. His circle of engagement was really tight.

You know what... I think each of the disciples is convinced he’s BB/DE/MA/CF/AB. Remember...at one point John says to Jesus, “Master we saw someone casting out demons in your name & we told him to stop because he wasn’t with us.” And he thinks Jesus is going to be proud of him...James & John got their mom to ask Jesus if they could sit @ his right/left hands at the feast of his kingdom...seats of honour & everyone else @ the foot of the table...the disciples understood *close communion* before there was such a thing...they understood insiders/outsideers & wanted to be able to decide who was which. So do we...we know who we avoid & who we seek out...who we treat respectfully & who we treat at arm’s length...listen/ignore...

So Jesus speaks to that in them & us...*Jesus sat down, called the twelve disciples over to him, & said, “Whoever wants to be first must take last place & be the servant of everyone else.” Then he put a little child among them. Taking the child in his arms, he said to them, “Anyone who welcomes a little child like this on my behalf welcomes me, & anyone who welcomes me welcomes not only me but also my Father who sent me.”* Jesus redefines greatness. He takes our operating definition & stands it on its head.

NB... Jesus does not say greatness is being a child & he doesn’t say greatness is in being childlike. Greatness *is* in *welcoming* the child. Now most of us go...*whew! I can do that! Who doesn’t love hanging w/ kids?!?!?* That’s **NOT** what Jesus said. We’ve so romanticized/sentimentalized children/childhood in the last 100 yrs we have to listen w/ a different set of ears to understand. When Jesus takes hold of this child...he puts someone in their midst w/ no social/cultural value. In Jesus’ day, a child had no status, no rights, no privileges, & no value in the moment. Children were consumers not contributors. They were in many ways a burden because they had to be protected, provided for, & safeguarded. They had no natural wisdom or capacity...useless in combat & often dangerous to themselves & others. Leave ‘em alone long enough & something’s going to get broken or lost. At best they were an investment in the future...but as children (little child) they were more cost than benefit. Remember the 12 tried to stop parents bringing children to Jesus so he could touch/bless them.

What does it mean & look like for you & me to be great in today’s **world?** Does your circle of engagement include those w/ no social/cultural value...who are a burden, more cost than benefit...who take more than they give...who possess little natural wisdom, teach-ability, or capacity...who may always be consumers > contributors? Are those folks in your contact list in your phone? Do you have lunch/coffee w/ ‘em? Mt 25:31ff Jesus draws a stark conclusion based on how we serve those who are “hungry, thirsty, stranger, naked, sick or **in** prison.” Did I widen my circle to draw those folks in or did I shut my eyes to their needs?

Greatness is not found in my accolades or my scrapbook of news-clippings where I’m the feature. Greatness is not found in my ability to grin & grip among the elites & movers/shakers & convince the public benefactors or politicians to part w/ a few dollars from their millions from some pet project. Greatness generally means your hands are dirty or your wallet is empty because you’ve been working on someone else’s behalf...you’ve actually been doing. Greatness is found not in what we have accomplished & gained for ourselves but in how “the least of these”/children are better off because of our efforts. Greatness is found when Jesus is allowed to transform your life such that people are glad to see you because you are always an encouragement, always have a kind word or always have time to listen...

Make your ways known to me, O Lord; point out the road for me to follow. Be careful what you pray for... "But to you who are willing to listen, I say, love your enemies! Do good to those who hate you. Bless those who curse you. Pray for those who hurt you. If someone slaps you on one cheek, offer the other cheek also. If someone demands your coat, offer your shirt also. Give to anyone who asks; and when things are taken away from you, don't try to get them back. Do to others as you would like them to do to you." – Lk 6:27-31

Forgiving those who don't apologize, ask or amend their behaviour...greatness. Refusing bitterness or envy...greatness. Speak the truth in love despite fear of attack...greatness. To assume the lower place so someone who has nothing can have something...greatness. To recognize honour value worth & dignity even in those who show me none of those things...greatness.

Living the way of Jesus is not something I can muscle-up & do by dint of will & sheer determination. Only the transforming power of Christ in me by the Holy Spirit can make me go out of **my** way to follow **his**: "If you love only those who love you, why should you get credit for that? Even sinners love those who love them! If you do good only to those who do good to you, why should you get credit? Even sinners do that! If you lend money only to those who can repay you, why should you get credit? Even sinners lend to other sinners for a full return. Love your enemies! Do good to them. Lend to them without expecting to be repaid. Then your reward from heaven will be very great, & you will truly be acting as children of the Most High, for he is kind to those who are unthankful & wicked. You must be merciful, just as your Father is merciful." – Lk 6:32-36 That right there is beyond me...but because I trust God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. – Rom 5:8 then I can be made more like that by the One who actually did it.

Make your ways known to me, O Lord; point out the road for me to follow.
Lead me by your truth and teach me, for you are the God who saves me.
All day long I put my hope in you.

It's a dangerous prayer. You can be assured the Father answers & shows us in Jesus. The question is only, "Will we walk that way?" Living the way of Jesus is about living how Jesus lived...Living how he would deal w/ people & circumstances in your life as if he was you. Living the way of Jesus is about living according to who you are as beloved child of God in whom God delights. Jesus only ever issued one call... Follow **me**...

Discipleship is to walk w/ Jesus such that all we are is absorbed in him...focused on him...directed by him...where you trust **HIS WORD** about God & about you to determine your identity & shape your life & where you walk **HIS WAY** everywhere you are every day you live.

TAKE IT HOME – As you leave today, be specific & share w/ your neighbour...

The way of the world is to close the circle of our lives to the special few, the chosen.

The way of Jesus is to widen the circle to make a space for others.

What is one way that you can widen the circle around you this coming week?

Let's pray with that in mind...

Make your ways known to me, O Lord; point out the road for me to follow.
Lead me by your truth and teach me, for you are the God who saves me.
All day long I put my hope in you.

Lord Jesus, change my mind, change my heart, change whatever in me prevents your Spirit from leading me deeper in trusting you, in offering more of me to your purposes here. Change my fears into boldness, my worries into trust, change my sickness to health, my lack into your abundance. Change my confusion to wisdom so that I might give to others what you have given me. I pray right now for those living distant from your grace...use me in their lives...use me to make space for your grace in their hearts...In your name we pray... Amen