

## Jesus Christ the GOAT

King of Glory Lutheran Church

September 21-22, 2024

Pastor Ruth Ann Loughry

Mark 9:30-37: 18<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost: Year B

<sup>30</sup>[Jesus and the disciples went on] and passed through Galilee. He did not want anyone to know it;<sup>31</sup>for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, “The Son of Man is to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him, and three days after being killed, he will rise again.” <sup>32</sup>But they did not understand what he was saying and were afraid to ask him.

<sup>33</sup>Then they came to Capernaum; and when he was in the house he asked them, “What were you arguing about on the way?” <sup>34</sup>But they were silent, for on the way they had argued with one another who was the greatest. <sup>35</sup>He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, “Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all.” <sup>36</sup>Then he took a little child and put it among them; and taking it in his arms, he said to them, <sup>37</sup>“Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.”

*Great irony – walking with the GOAT, arguing about being goat, afraid to be curious – who are curious? Children? Who has no power, and are not ‘greatest’? Children. We welcome one such child – welcome all the children, not only some. For when we do, we welcome God’s very self into our presence. Who welcomed the children, the GOAT, Jesus Himself. Thus, welcomes us and all our questions.*

The term used to be reserved for only a few. I guess it still is, but it certainly is more common. We heard it often during the summer Olympics. Who is the GOAT? Who is the Greatest of All Time?

Simone Biles? ‘Oh no, she says she’s ‘just from TX, thank you very much.’ Well, her scores and flips tell otherwise. Is Tiger Woods the GOAT in golfing? Tom Brady or Peyton Manning, are either of them the GOAT’s in football?

The Greatest of all Time! Jesus, The One who was The Absolute Greatest of All Time, Eternal Time and Earthly Time, was literally walking the dusty road while two of His disciples are arguing about which one of them was better than the other.

Ironic? Yes! Almost laughable? Surely. Predictable...hmm, what do you think?

This passage is the second Passion Prediction in Mark’s Gospel. Jesus tells the disciples that He is headed to the cross, to His death. And this time, He includes

that a human, will betray Him. ‘The Son of Man will be betrayed into human hands.’ Perhaps this is what scared them so badly. ‘Could it be me?’

We can give these men much grace for what certainly had to be hard news to hear. Jesus is telling them something very scary. Their own beloved rabbi, was going to be crucified.

Instead of being courageous and asking more questions, they revert to what their brains can handle, thinking all the while that Jesus is not hearing their conversation.

‘Well, who do you think will be His right hand man?’

‘Oh, I’m sure it will be me!’

‘Come on, give me a break! No way! I’ll be Jesus’ top guy.’

In modern psychological terms, they revert to their reptilian brains. Our reptilian brains are the oldest, most primitive part of our brain having to do with self-preservation, aggression, or marking out one’s territory.

They can’t be curious, they are too scared to ask questions. So instead it’s, ‘which disciple will be voted GOAT?’

Let’s give them much grace, yes? We get a difficult diagnosis from the doctor. Thank goodness someone else is with us to listen and ask questions, because we just stopped listening. Haven’t heard another word the doctor is saying.

Have we ever been afraid to ask questions of God? Of the Bible? Of the pastor? It seems to me that church can be a place where our fear eats our curiosity for lunch quite regularly. We get embarrassed that we ‘should’ know everything there is to know about the Bible.

Well, don’t you know that actually true? When your family quit bringing you to church after 4<sup>th</sup> grade, you didn’t go to parochial school, had no religion classes in high school or college and then you walk into a church adult class, believe me, every pastor expects that you know the whole Bible, it’s history, church history, who all the King Herods were and how they differed from one other, Christology, all the theological possibilities about what was really happening when Jesus hung dying on the cross, the Babylonian exile, the Maccabean rebellion and an exact date for when Christ will come again. All of this while you’re enjoying a donut and church coffee.

A pastor was giving a children's message about a squirrel. 'What animal is brown, has a fluffy tail and lives in the park?' No one answered. 'Oh, come on, you all know this. What animal is brown, has really fluffy tail, lives in a park and gathers nuts to eat?' Again no answer. Finally, the reverend asked the one child who always had something to say, 'What animal is brown, fluffy tail, lives in a park, gathers nuts and runs up and down trees?'

The child answered, "Well, we all know the correct answer is a squirrel, but you usually just want us to say, 'Jesus'."

See? If you don't know something, just say, Jesus. The answer is always, Jesus.

Friday night and Saturday, we had our second Women's Retreat. The theme was, 'Women of the Bible Speak.' We studied Mary & Martha, Miriam, Deborah, the unnamed servant girl from 1 Kings, Anna, and Mary Magdalene. I am so proud – so very proud of all the women who researched their woman, prepared short presentations and questions on each lady to their peers. These women, were amazing! That might well have been out of their comfort zone. But they studied, prepped and made their presentations. Incredible. They were curious.

Rev. Martin Luther was curious. His curiosity started the Reformation! This Catholic Monk teaching at Whittenburg, began asking questions. Quite too many of them. We are descended from Luther. He didn't want people to check their brains at the door. Luther encouraged questions, conversation, intellect! If there is one place you can always ask a question...it's at church!

Who else is always curious? Who wear adults out at age 2 by asking the question 'why' hundreds of times a day? Children. Children are curious. They aren't afraid to **not** know things. Nor are they afraid **to know things**.

All the kids were drawing pictures and the teacher asked Susie what she was drawing. 'God.' 'No one knows what God looks like, sweetheart.' 'They will in a minute!'

Children are curious. But they don't have power or influence. They don't know everything. They are by nature, needy and messy and tired and hungry. They rely on adults for everything. When they try to speak back to power, the adults usually win.

Yet Jesus, the Greatest of All Time welcomed them. He said, 'Let them come and sit in my lap. Don't stop them.' He made room for them. Just like I suspect He

made room for these grown men, with their reptilian brains and large egos, freaking out at the idea that Jesus would die.

Then Jesus said, 'If you welcome a child, you welcome me.' In other words, still reflecting on power and status, Jesus implies that when we open the circle to those who cannot influence us, those who have no power in the world, those who only need us to come and sit with them while they eat a free meal, or listen to their heartbroken story, **it's then we have welcomed God in all of God's greatness.**

Being great does not mean having it all together. It doesn't mean being respected by all our peers and having degrees hung up on a wall. **What being great means to Jesus is having childlike trust. Childlike wonder. Childlike love and a heart of service for all of Jesus' other children.** (repeat)

Challenging? Yep! Easier to talk about last week's Bronco's score or the team that isn't performing very well? Maybe? But when we begin doing that we start acting like our thumbs are in our armpits and there's a swagger in our step. Reptilian brain.

Then Jesus says to that little child inside of each one of us. 'It's ok. You don't have to prove yourself to me or anyone else. Just let me love you. Let me love you, like I love every other person on earth. What I do ask of you, is to love and serve others. But you don't have to be great – at anything really. You get to be loved.'  
Amen.