Lent 5B 2021 The Jesus Way of Service is God’s New Way to Save Us

Jeremiah 31: 31 -34 Hebrews 5: 1-10 Mark 10: 32-35

When we talk about greatness, it has come usually at the expense of others. So for instance, the Great One of Hockey, Wayne Gretzky, has scored more points (2857) than anyone else. That record has come through competition. When it comes to holding records in professional hockey, Gretzky has dominated.

If one talks about domination in world power, look no further than the ambitious 30 year old from Macedonia who conquered the world. More importantly, Alexander's conquests spread Greek culture, also known as Hellenism, across his empire. In fact, Alexander's reign marked the beginning of a new era known as the Hellenistic Age because of the powerful influence that Greek culture had on other people.

Whoever holds such power, can easily exert one’s will over others and make it into law.

Jesus turns this thinking on its head when he measures greatness by service in His kingdom of grace. He said that the Gentile way was to lord it over others. But his apostles were to go into the world to serve and not to dominate. In fact, before His Ascension, Jesus was given all authority in heaven and earth and with it, he sends his apostles out to baptize and to teach His word.

The Jesus way is to serve not to be served.

That may sound quite different to our way. Our way is to compete, exceed and dominate. We think it is normal. We live it at school, at work, in the marketplace and even in church, where churches compete for prospects by putting on a better show.

After winning in this world, comes the prize. Spoils to the victor. Alexander’s influence has reached far beyond Greece and can even be seen among us if you squint hard enough. The record holders are exalted. Gretzky’s point total seems impossible to beat and his icon is venerated in hockeydom.

Compare that to Jesus who told his disciples three times that he was going to Jerusalem to suffer a humiliating death. The gentiles will lord it over him when Pilate gives the verdict of crucifixion. And in three days he will rise from the dead.

The Jesus way is carrying his cross and dying upon it. It is the ultimate way of serving. He became utterly self-less there. He became slave of all. His burden to carry was heavier than his cross, but was our sin.

Can there be anyone greater than this sin-bearer?

Yet even Jesus did not exalt himself. The writer to the Hebrews wrote that “*Christ did not exalt himself to be made a high priest but was appointed by him who said to him, You are my Son.”* Jesus did not take the office of the Christ but was given it by the Holy Spirit at his baptism and declared to be the eternal Son of God by his Father. These honours were given to him.

The way of moralism is different than the way of Jesus. It teaches that Jesus was humble and so should we. It loads onto our backs a burden that we cannot carry. It says that if we want God to reward us, then we have to serve like Jesus, be like him, and carry our cross. It puts it all on you.

Now we know that God’s law is good. There is nothing wrong with it. It is holy because it came from a holy God. Yet God said that it was broken rather quickly by Israel when it produced a golden calf to worship and honour instead of the living God.

This was the old covenant that came down by two tablets given to Moses that were shattered upon the idol in the midst of dancing and singing. By this covenant no one can be saved. Not even the Lord’s disciples who wanted to lift themselves above their fellow disciples to sit at the Lord’s right and left hand in glory.

James and John asked Jesus to give them whatever they wanted. Is this not lifting up their will above God’s. It is a prayer that ends with my will be done instead of the Lord’s will be done. It is very much the way of the world’s competition, and self-exaltation.

They still did not understand nor agree with the Jesus way of serving. They heard the Lord’s prediction of his suffering service upon the cross three times and it still did not get through. It shows that the old covenant cannot save us. Not because there is anything wrong with it. The fault lies in us. We are too slow to believe, too blind to follow the Jesus way, and too proud to be humiliated by a cross.

If anyone would be saved there needs to be a new way. The old way shows our rightful death and our earned reward of being separated from God by our own doing and being. How can we ever enter God’s kingdom? Who will fight for us when we are too weak and are defeated?

God makes a new way for us. It is the way of Jesus. It is a new covenant that God will put into play. God will make this new covenant. God will put his Son on a cross. God will put our sin upon His holy Sin-bearer. God will forgive our iniquity and will remember our sin no more.

We hear the Lamb of God say in the Upper Room on the night of his greatest suffering, taking the cup and saying: Drink of it all of you; this cup is the New Testament in my blood, which is shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.

The Jesus way is God’s new way of saving us. It is not new to God. He always was saving his people. From the moment he provided the animal skins to our fallen parents, to His mighty deeds of deliverance from Egypt, to his promise of His coming Son through the prophets.

The Jesus way as God’s new way showed endless patience to the disciples James and John. When they asserted their will against God’s, when they wanted to exalt themselves above the rest, when they sought domination rather than subordination, see how Jesus was kind to them!

He told them to leave the seats of honour to God who alone will appoint them. He alone will drink the cup of the father’s wrath for all our sin. He alone will carry a cross that we deserve and will help us carry our own crosses. He shows us that greatness is measured by God in service.

The Jesus way of His cross is the ransom paid for us all. The price was paid by Jesus. It was measured in terms of his life-blood. It was accepted by the father, who now accepts you through it. By his service, Jesus has opened God’s kingdom to you. In his cup of the New Testament, he delivers it to you. By it, God will hear all your prayers, and gently guide you even when your prayers are selfish and foolish as that of James and John.

When we wonder why the church looks so frail and weak in this world, when we complain why we have to suffer so much and why we may get cancer or covid, than be comforted by the Jesus way. It is the only way that leads you back home to God. It is finished and sealed by His blood.

As Jesus treated his disciples James and John with endless patience and steadfast kindness, he treats you now by his way of the cross. Jesus is great because his father said so. It was God the father who called his son as slave to all by being our Sin-bearer.

Walter Gretzky died not too long ago. And there were many accolades heaped on him especially by his famous son Wayne. But the one that will be heard in heaven’s halls is when God the Father says to each one of his children: Well done my good and faithful servant. It applies to Jesus first. It is meant for sinners who were given to by Jesus. It comes by His self-less service of the cross. It is God’s new way of saving us and who has always been good to us!