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Faith That Works 4: "The Greatest"
Psalm 150 Mark 9:30-37 James 3:13-4:3; 7-10

INTRODUCTION TO PSALM 150

Psalm 150 is the grand finale to the Songbook of Israel. Psalm 100 challenges us to make a joyful noise to the Lord. Psalm 150 lists the instruments with which to do that very thing. Some of us here this morning may have never played an instrument, but all of us have at our fingertips the ability to follow the instructions of Psalm 47 which says "Clap your hands all ye People, Shout unto God with loud songs of joy." Clapping and shouting is something most all of us can do. Hear the word of the Lord from Psalm 150

INTRODUCTION TO MARK 9:30-37

In our gospel lesson this morning Jesus continues telling his closest followers about his impending suffering and death and they are still dreaming of a personal glory. So he preaches a children's sermon to them using a child. Hear the word of the Lord from the Gospel of Mark 9, verses 30-37.

Let's Pray. Dear Lord, Thank you for this, your word. Open our eyes to see, our minds to understand, our hearts to receive your word. Open my lips to share what you have given to me and prepare us all to be changed so that we may respond to your word through the power of your Holy Spirit. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

A couple of birthdays ago my son gave me this birthday card. It features a pyramid of goats on the front. On the inside my son described me as the G.O.A.T. standing for the Greatest Of All Time.

When it comes to fiddling around, Kevin Hardin is the G.O.A.T. in our worship today. Amen?

Leonard Bernstein once was asked what was the hardest instrument to play? He responded, "Second fiddle." (Right Kevin?)

Muhammed Ali was famous for saying, "I AM...the Greatest." While it is true that there was a time when he was the greatest boxer in the world, it is not true anymore. Someone else is now the newest and latest greatest. I will say that after seeing Will Smith portray Ali in the movie Ali that Will Smith is the greatest portrayer of the Greatest.

Tiger Woods who once was the G.O.A.T. in Golf, shot a five-under 65 in the third round of the Tour Championship at East Lake Golf Club in Atlanta on Saturday to secure the solo lead entering Sunday's final round. It's been 5 years since he was the Greatest.

There once was a politician was sitting at his campaign headquarters when the phone rang. He listened intently, and after a moment his face brightened.

When he hung up, he immediately phoned his mother to tell her the good news.

“Mom,” he shouted, “the results are in. I won the election!”

“Honestly?” she asked.

The politician’s smile faded. “Aw, Mom, why bring that up at a time like this?” ☺

The legendary coach of the Green Bay Packers Vince Lombardi has been quoted as saying, “Winning isn’t everything. It’s the only thing.”

There are some people today who would divide the world into two groups, the winners and the losers. And it doesn’t matter how many people you have to step on, the only thing that matters is to win.

The Cleveland Browns ended the longest losing streak in NFL history last Thursday night when their 635-day winless streak ended with their 21-17 win over the Jets.

With the Browns off the hook, the honor of holding the league’s longest winless streak now rests with the Texans. Counting the 6 losses at the end of last season their losing streak is at 8. Today two O-2 teams meet. Unless there is a tie, one of them will lose their losing streak.

Humility is an elusive virtue. Even Jesus’ disciples struggled with it. The disciples were embarrassed when Jesus asked them what they had been talking about as they journeyed to Capernaum, for they had been talking about because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest among them.

I can imagine Philip saying, “Well I brought Nathaniel, and I brought the little boy with his lunch.” To which Nathaniel said, “Jesus saw me under the fig tree long before you ever came to tell me about him.” John would say, “Yes but I’m the one he likes the most.” To which Peter would say, “Well I walked on water...(for 5 steps).” To which Andrew would say, “Hey I brought you to Jesus and if I hadn’t introduced you, you never would have had the chance.”

Jesus sat down and, as if they were children, called his disciples to gather around him. Then he said, "If anyone would be first, he must be the last of all, a servant of all." Then He took a little child in His arms and indicated that we need to humbly serve others as if we were serving Christ. He said, “Whoever welcomes one such little child welcomes

me...and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me.”

In front of 12 grown men who had been acting very childish, Jesus admonished them not to be child-ish, but to be child-like. The child he set before them had no accomplishments of her own to pull out, no bragging rights, no track record, no degrees, and no riches. He set before them a child who trusts in others to care for her, who believes what she is told, who forgives, who loves, who doesn't hide her emotions when she is delighted OR disappointed. He set before them a child who had the least amount of things going for her, who hadn't walked on water or introduced anyone to Jesus yet.

Children have a way of cutting to the chase. A pastor was once doing a children's sermon and he asked a group of children,

“If I sold my house and my car, had a big garage sale and gave all my money to the church, would that get me into Heaven?”

"NO!" the children all answered.

"If I cleaned the church every day, mowed the yard, and kept everything neat and tidy, would that get me into Heaven?"

Again, the answer was, "NO!"

"Well, then, if I was kind to animals and gave candy to all the children and loved my wife, would that get me into Heaven?" I asked them again.

Again, they all answered, "NO!"

"Well," I continued, "then how can I get into Heaven?" A five-year-old boy shouted out, "YOU GOTTA BE DEAD."

The disciples were only human just like us.. They wanted to stand out just as you and I want to stand out from our peers. There is nothing wrong with that as long it does not cause us to mistreat others or betray our values. My guess is Jesus wanted them to be ambitious because ambitious people get things done. He just wanted them to be ambitious in the right way.

Some of the greatest people who have ever lived were also among the most ambitious. It is said that Michelangelo prayed: “Lord, grant that I may always desire more than I can accomplish.”

Benjamin Franklin made a list of character qualities that he wanted to develop in his own life. When he mastered one virtue, he went on to the next. He did pretty well, he said, until he got to humility. Every time he thought he was making significant progress, he would be so pleased with himself that he became proud.

If a news reporter were to talk to our friends, neighbors, or fellow church members and ask them to describe us, would they use the word humble? Jesus says, “If you want to be the greatest, you must learn to be the greatest ...at serving. “

Service is not an ambition to which enough people aspire. So many prefer to look out for number one rather than to look out to serve number one. The hard truth of our lives is that we would much rather be served than to serve to receive rather than to give. Service is the key to successful living.

There once was a pastor who was frustrated with 4 of his members. Their names were Everybody, Somebody, Anybody, and Nobody.

There was an important job to be done and Everybody was sure that Somebody would do it. Anybody could have done it, but Nobody did it. Somebody got angry about that because it was Everybody's job. Everybody thought Anybody could do it, but Nobody realized that Everybody wouldn't do it. It ended up that Everybody blamed Somebody when Nobody did what Anybody could have done.

I believe that we are a welcoming church. I believe we stand ready to make people feel welcome. Our challenge is in the come part of welcome. That's why today we made a special effort to have special music and encouraged Anybody and Everybody to invite Somebody. Obviously, from today's attendance at least Nobody didn't.

As somebody once put it, "Live such a life that when it comes your time to die, even the undertaker is sad." If we would be the greatest person in our community, we have got to be a person who is willing to serve the community, serve the town, serve the children, serve the youth, and serve the Lord.

I believe that we are a serving church. Serving is what God's people are all about. That's who we are. In Philippians 2: Paul describes Jesus this way, "Though he was in the form of God became man and took upon himself the form of a servant."

Our passage from James warned us that worldly wisdom prompts jealousy, bitterness, prejudice, covetousness, self-aggrandizement and every other vile behavior that polarizes people and ignites disorder. The wisdom of God is sown in peace so the harvest yields peaceful, compassionate and merciful deeds. Faith that Works is a faith that derives its sense of worth and greatness from service to others. Faith that Works is a faith that is without a trace of partiality. Faith that Works resists the devil. Faith that Works draws near to God and sees God meet them more than half way.

Thirty three years ago, a hundred thousand fans watched as Richard Petty ended his 45-race losing streak and picked up stockcar racing's biggest purse-which was at the time was: \$73,900. It all happened at the Daytona 500. Petty had been less than first for 45 times in a row. Finally, he was number one.

Petty's win, however, was a complete surprise. Going into the last lap, he was running 30 seconds behind the two leaders. All at once the car in second place tried to pass the No. 1 man on the final stretch. This caused the first car to drift inside and force the challenger onto the infield grass, and slightly out of control. What happened next was

incredible. The offended driver pulled his car back onto the track, caught up with the leader, and forced him into the outside wall. Both vehicles came to a screeching halt. The two drivers jumped out and quickly got into an old-fashioned slugging match. In the meantime, third-place Petty cruised by for the win.

Like Jesus said, The first shall be last and the Third shall be First.

Ali was only the Greatest as long as he could box. According to Jesus you can be the greatest when you think outside the box. when you move outside the box ...when you step outside your comfort zone and trust like a little child. When you forgive like a little child. when you WELCOME a little child and when you reach out and INVITE a little child to come with you so WE can WELCOME THEM here and into the family of God.

I thank God that in God's family you don't have to get in the ring and take on all comers to be considered among the greatest. I thank God that as you serve others you don't have to worry that someone else younger and quicker and stronger than you can come along and take away your title. I thank God that In God's family there are plenty of titles to go around. I thank God that when it comes to serving others each one of us can be the G.O.A.T. The Greatest Of All Time!. I thank God that in God's family we have the privilege of spending the rest of our lives serving and in so doing become and continue to be among....the greatest.

Let's pray. Jesus, you said, "Greater love has no one than this –to lay down one's life for dear friends." We thank you for laying down your life for us and for calling us to follow your example. Thank you for little children and the example they serve to us as walking, talking, laughing, and crying illustrations of your kingdom. Give us hearts to become child-like in our faith and put away child-ish things. Give us hearts that and hands and voices that reach out and invite all of God's children no matter how young or old to come so we can extend to them God's welcome.

We continue to pray for those devastated by Hurricane Florence. Be with those first responders and service personnel that have gone there to help and serve others.

We pray for those who still have not been able to return to their homes from Hurricane Harvey....for those who are ill, facing or recovering from surgery, for those on our hearts this morning.

We pray for those who are waiting for an invitation. These things we pray in Jesus name. Amen