



Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. AMEN

This morning we hear of two competing ideas in our Gospel text. The first deals with what it means to be successful in the eyes of the world. Secondly, what it means to be first in the kingdom of God. Today, I believe that most people get these two things a bit confused. Our world values the successful. I don't know about you, but I would rather be first in the kingdom of God, even if it means being last?

Our society today tells us that the successful person acquires lots of money, fame or power, sometimes all three. These things are usually in short supply so the successful gather a larger than average slice of these things that are limited. And the world does not care that the more you have, the less someone else has. But an attribute of money, fame and power is that they can slip away even quicker than they can be collected.

Fortunes can be made and lost. Any of you remember a few years ago when we were depressed at the shrinking size of our 401K's. Our portfolios were shrinking and there was nothing we could do about it.

Fame too can be made and lost. Chris Harrison of Bachelor Nation fame made one questionable comment about girls dressed in southern belle costumes and he is OUT. Never again to be the face of the Bachelor dynasty. Or how about

Mike Richards of Jeopardy. Gets the job to replace Alex Trebec and someone finds a clip from an old YouTube video, and he is OUT. Mike even lost his producers job for Jeopardy as well.

Power too can be made and lost. Just ask Governor Gavin Newsome about his recall election last Tuesday. He feared that he would lose his power as the political leader of the huge state of California. Not this time, but I think most politicians dread election day for fear of losing their power.

You see, these things that make people seem successful are in short supply and they can easily slip away. Money, fame and power can be here today and gone tomorrow. But this view of success is only of this world. And in the world, we live, all things good or bad come to an end. And so, it behooves us to grab on to the alternate view of success.

This view is what our Gospel reading today is promoting. As they travel the roads of Galilee, Jesus is teaching his disciples. Well, at least he is trying to teach them. He talks of his impending death at the hands of the religious leaders, the betrayal and horrible death he will face before raising from the dead on the third day. But the disciples are dealing with their own worldly power struggle of who will be the greatest. Jesus hears this and is most likely saddened that his own disciples are more concerned with who is the one among them most likely to succeed. Who will be the biggest success, the most popular and most prestigious? Who will end up on top? That is, as the world sees it.

Jesus, in his ultimate teaching and wisdom interjects himself in this conversation and sets them straight. "Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all." Wow this is a new idea. Jesus knew that those grabbing money, fame and power are after something that will be fleeting. So, he was telling them a better way, a way that would not ever let them down. It was a way that would bring them into the kingdom of God.

Servanthood is the way to go. There are abundant ways to serve others. The list and opportunities will never end. It is part of the human condition to be dependent on each other.

The last two months have made it abundantly clear to me that we all need each other. I have spent more than half of my life being a caregiver. From being a mom and wife to director of educational ministries at a large church in Delafield to pastor here at Christ the Servant. I have always enjoyed helping

others. I love working with The Lord's Cupboard, trying to find new ways to serve those that are food insecure in this community. But cancer, has changed some of that for me. I became the care receiver. The stack of cards on my desk represents only a few of the folks that are caring for me. So many people and churches have me on their prayer list. I had to ask for a ride a couple times to town and a neighbor had to come over to help lift a few things for me after surgery. It has been humbling to accept your mercy, love and help. It is not easy to be on the other end of the stick, so to say. But at some point, in our lives it may happen to each one of us.

The first can become last. How is that old saying, "the ladder of success narrows as it reaches the top". And yes, we are all tempted to kept climbing, even going over and around others along the way. But when we get to the top, the prize may not be as wonderful as we thought. In fact, I see it as very lonely. But folks, Jesus has a new way. Success is not like a big ladder but rather a big circle where we are all in it together. We are all enriched by others, and all can join in. This is the model Jesus is offering to us as true success.

Think with me for a minute about how that circle might look. It might look like our WELCA meeting last Monday where 15 women gathered to discuss the Holiday Market. Yes, there was a person leading the meeting to keep order. You understand why if you have you ever been in a room where 15 women were all talking at the same time. But together we made decisions on the who, what, when, where and why the Holiday Market would be. Volunteers for certain part of the work, ideas for promotion, raffle prizes, and lots more details were organized. Everyone was able to voice an opinion and is now vested in making the Holiday Market a success. It was a good example of what we can do together to serve our Lord and Savior.

Another great example was seen here in this sanctuary last week when the quilts were displayed and blessed to go to Lutheran world Relief. What a wonderful ministry it is to be able to serve those less fortunate around the world while having fun gathering to do it.

Last Wednesday, was Roberto Clemente day in Major League Baseball. Roberto Enrique Clement Walker of the Pittsburg Pirates is honored one day a year by baseball. He was an amazing baseball player who is in the Hall of Fame, was an MVP, batting average leader, Gold Glove recipient, an All Star and the list goes on. Not only was Clemente an outstanding baseball player but he was involved in community work as well. Each off season he worked

endlessly to help others. Noticeable was his work in Nicaragua to help those who were devastated by the earthquake in 1972. He was not only an amazing athlete but a servant of humanity. To give notice and to honor his work, each year all major league teams nominate one of their players that displays the same great qualities of service to receive the league award. "The Roberto Clemente Award is bestowed annually to the player who best represents the game of Baseball through extraordinary character, community involvement, philanthropy and positive contributions to both on and off the field."

This year one of my favorite players Brett Sutter, the raptor is the Milwaukee Brewer nominee. I am sure that he does not serve others with the idea of getting a reward, but that in itself makes this honor so amazing.

Even if you have been blessed to be rich, famous or powerful, Jesus encourages you to be a servant. The end of our Gospel reading deals with letting the children come to Jesus. Children are the symbol of vulnerability, powerlessness and dependency. And He goes on to say that if we welcome and serve people like children it is just like serving Jesus himself and our Father God. What an honor it is to serve others.

Jesus did a great service to you and to me when he died on the cross that horrible death and then rose again from the dead. We are therefore blessed with forgiveness, abundant and eternal life. And we are only asked to serve others, not give up our lives. Our motto at Christ the Servant is "Christians serving God by Serving Others". And doesn't that just say it all. To have the heart to serve others is the greatest gift we could ever imagine. So, if you want to be the greatest in God's kingdom, service is the answer. AMEN