

'I'm great' Rev Stuart Simpson

Sermon 21st October 2018

Hebrews 5:1-10

Mark 10:35-45

One of our family's most favourite stories is called 'Bojabi' by Bill Harley. The story is about a group of animals in Africa who are dying of hunger. The only food they have is a strange fruit with no name. Seeing it has no name they are afraid to eat it. The excitement happens when a few of the animals seek out the only animal in the jungle that will know the name of the fruit – the Lion. I won't say too much more about the story just in case you want to hear it for yourself, however I want to share with you my favourite character, which is the mouse

The mouse is simply known by what he says – "I'm great!"

That is all he says "I'm great, I'm great, I'm great"

The mouse has no problem with self- esteem

I wonder if we can all be like the mouse, where we think we are great, or at least believe we deserve to be great and that's what we do in our lives – seek to be great,

Seek to be great but in the wrong way

Seek to become great by following those who might give us some power – their power might rub off on us

By climbing over others to get to the top – like in the video clip

In the gospel reading today, this is the main issue that Jesus has to deal with, his disciples desiring to be great –

His response isn't to abolish them of this desire, but rather to remind them again, (this is the third time he's tried to tell them he is going to die in Jerusalem), that being great in God's Kingdom is when you don't seek greatness

It's interesting to note that when Jesus enters his glory, he is dying on the cross (Luke 23:39-43)

And as he enters paradise, he has on his right and left two criminals, who have also been crucified

I don't think either James or John would have thought, asking Jesus that they be seated next to him, that he meant crucifixion

"You still don't get it do you", Jesus says

If you really knew what you were asking – to be truly great – you might regret what you ask for – are you sure you can drink the cup I am about to drink?

We're sure!

To which Jesus agrees

By the time that Mark is written, James will have been killed by Herod Agrippa I in 44 C.E. for his role as a leader in the Jerusalem Church

The fate of John is uncertain, though traditionally it was reported that he lived into old age in Ephesus.

To his disciples then and now, Jesus says

If you follow me, if you truly desire to follow me then you will only be great if you serve others, which ultimately could mean your own suffering and death

“Whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant,⁴⁴ and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all.

This is a slap in the face of what we have been brought up to believe – we are taught that ‘We are great’ we can do whatever we want and if we’re not there now we just need to work a bit harder,

a bit longer,

a bit smarter

and we will become great, we will become special, desired and loved.

Our lives become a seemingly endless movement to that place that is just beyond our reach – just beyond our grasp – but if we get there though, we believe life will have meaning, life will be glorious, we will just have to fight off all those other people who want to be where we are

I wonder what some of the leaders of history had to do to remain great in the eyes of the world

Who did they have to push aside, get rid of or walk over to get to the top?

To this, I believe Jesus is saying we have to live not with the mantra ‘I am great’

But rather ‘You are great’

First, ‘You oh God are great! God you are awesome, majestic and glorious!

Second, ‘you are great’ – the other – made in the image of our awesome, majestic and glorious God and because of Jesus given the ability to no longer be caught in the cycle of self- seeking glory which leads nowhere

You are great,

you are great

please don’t get me wrong here, living this way isn’t an invitation for us to hate ourselves or for other to mistreat us, rather it is the tuning on its head the thinking that we are ‘God’

Story: a sister of Mercy who served with Mother Teresa in Calcutta was once tending to the festering, oozing sores of a destitute patient when a tourist came to see the famous hospital. The tourist commented, "I wouldn't do that for all the money in the world." The sister looked up and replied, "Neither would I."

The saying 'You are great' is more than words proclaiming the other is loved by God, that they are great because of Jesus, it is the activity of love in the midst of dirt, distress and disease

Places that most tourists would not want to hang around in for long

It is about serving others not because we want to be noticed by the world but because we do it for Jesus, because of Jesus

Jesus says this about himself: "For even the son of man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life/soul a ransom for the cause of many."

That is to say, Jesus is willing to lose his life/his soul in order to rescue others

This points to the courage that following Jesus requires

It is not a safe way of neglecting the needs of others in order to preserve our own lives/our own souls

In fact, the paradox of faith, is that it is losing our own lives/our own souls that we preserve it

In turning from self-seeking glory to the only one who is Glorious, the Sovereign One, and rightly to be blessed.

And serving others even if it means getting down in the dirt, distress and disease of the world to tell and show the deep and profound love of God, witnessed in the actions, words and life, death and resurrection of Jesus

This serving others may be the simple act of offering a kind word, the binding of wounds, the giving up of time, of caring for those who are hard to care for, or the nudging of others to turn from self-worship to the one who is truly Great!

Illustration: person in wheel chair and what greatness is to God