



5 Feet 11 Inches (Mark 10:35-45)

Twenty-First Sunday after Pentecost
October 17, 2021

Ascension Lutheran Church
Pastor Chris

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

A little boy walked through the center of the baseball diamond on his way to home plate. When he arrived at home plate, he dropped his glove to the ground. From his pocket he pulled a worn baseball. With the baseball in his left hand and the bat in his right hand, he tossed the ball up into the sky and shouted, “I am the greatest hitter in the world.” He swung and the ball hit the ground. “Strike one,” he said. He picked up the ball and tossed it into the sky a second time. “I am the greatest hitter in the world,” he shouted again. And again he swung and missed the ball as it landed on the ground. “Strike two,” he said. A third time, he picked up the ball, tossed the ball into the sky a little higher this time, and shouted, “I am the greatest hitter in the world.” And this time, he swung with all of his might, but still missed the ball as it landed on the ground with a dull thud. “Strike three,” he said. Defeated, he took a long, hard look at the ball on the ground and then his face lit up: “Wow, I am the greatest pitcher in the world.”

James and John have greatness all figured out today. Like the little boy who gives up the title of greatest hitter for greatest pitcher, James and John believe they have everything figured out when it comes to Jesus, this life of discipleship, and the promise of eternal life. They have spent enough time with Jesus to know that this is it. That what Jesus says is true. Like being in on the ground-floor of Google or better yet Starbucks. James and John are on the ground-floor of something so amazing, so spectacular that they want to confirm their spots on the board of directors for all eternity. And so they state their case. “Teacher, we want you to do whatever we ask of you.” And Jesus says to them, “What is it that you want me to do for you?” And they said to him, “Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.” Grant us to sit, Jesus. Make it all happen. We have invested our sweat equity into this start-up project and now we want to see the return. We want to know that our job security is not in question. We want to know that when we retire there will be eternal health benefits and stock options in the kingdom. We want to assure ourselves that we will always be integral members of the planning and vision team that we might have a say in the running of the kingdom of God. Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory. The sons of Zebedee had made their bid for eternal leadership that they might bask in the glory of their Savior forever at both the right and left hands of Jesus. They are out to serve—but with only some of the cost. James and John are way ahead of the rest of the disciples. They have made their bid, argued the costs and the sacrifices, and are now ready to hedge their bets for status in the kingdom of God.

But Jesus says to them, “You do not know what you are asking...to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared. As if to say, you have no idea what you are getting yourselves into by even making that request. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized? Jesus is out to prove a point with James and John--Do you really know what you are asking? Asks Jesus. Are you really sure you this is what you want?

Yesterday, I took my son and middle daughter to Pick and Save. We needed just a few items and now they are old enough to split up and go to different aisles to be more efficient. My son went to produce, my daughter to canned goods, and I went to the meat department. As we were all converging on the checkout line, I remembered that my youngest child was in need of Ranch – so I walked down the aisle and picked one up on my way to meet up with the rest of the family. I was holding the Ranch by the neck of the bottle and the full basket with the other hand. What I had not realized is that the Ranch was not sealed correctly and as my son reached out to grab the heavy basket, I squeezed the neck of the Ranch and the bottle exploded and Ranch was everywhere – my sleeve, my pants, my hand, and as I started to laugh – I realized there was Ranch all over the front of my son’s sweatshirt and he was most assuredly not laughing. I wonder if James and John are in the same boat.

They know enough – but are they ready for the surprises that will of course come in this life as we follow Jesus. They knew all about the struggles and the sacrifices and yet, were convinced that the joys of eternal life at the left and right hands of Jesus would be enough to counteract the struggles of this life of service as they walked in the footsteps of Jesus. They were so convinced that they staked their lives on those promises. And the other ten disciples – the Bible says they were displeased – other translations go bit father: angry; they lost their tempers; they were outraged. But Jesus ignores all of the complaining and continues teaching saying, “For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.” Jesus is laying out the map once again—the great plan—the big picture is being presented again to the disciples. Figuring out who is going to get the best seats, who will be the top dog, who will be the highest on the ladder will not serve any purpose other than to distract us from the whole story of who are to God and who God is for us. The kingdom of God is not about any of those things—the kingdom of God rushes into our lives when the greatest serve the least and when the king is lifted up on a cross to save us all.

There was a little boy one time who loved boats, and he was also very handy with his hands. So one day he decided that he was going to make himself a boat. He began working on it every spare minute he had. When he finished, it was perfect in every detail. The little boy’s favorite pastime was sailing his handmade boat. He would take it down to the large lake near his house and sail it along the shore.

One day while he was sailing, the wind began to pick up. He ran to get the boat before the wind pushed it too far out, but he was too late. He pulled off his shoes and waded out into the water, but he still couldn’t

reach it, and the wind was getting stronger and stronger. He ran back to his house to get his father to help. His father went back with him, but the boat was nowhere in sight. The little boy went home with his father, heartbroken. All the little boy seemed to do after that was mope around. One day he was walking slowly home from school when he glanced up into a pawnshop window and there was his boat. He ran into the pawnshop shouting, "That's my boat, that's my boat!" The owner of the pawnshop looked at him and said, "No, that's my boat, if you want it you'll have to buy it." The boy looked at the price tag and it was extremely high, because it was such a great little boat. He didn't know what to do so he went home and began to think of ways to raise money. He picked up odd jobs around the neighborhood cutting grass, raking leaves, washing cars and anything else anyone would hire him to do. Each week he would count his money. Finally, after several weeks he had earned enough money to buy the little boat. He took his piggy bank and ran all the way to the pawnshop. He ran into the shop and put the bank down on the counter so hard that it broke open. He told the pawnshop owner that he had come to buy his boat. The owner counted the money, to make sure it was all there. Then he went over to the shelf. Got the boat and handed it to the little boy. The shop owner heard the little boy say, as he walked out the door, "Little boat, you're twice mine. First I made you and now I bought you!" The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many.

I made the holy pilgrimage to Lambeau this past month. People told me of what I would experience. There were rumors of seas of green and gold where the beer flows like water and the brats rain down like manna in the wilderness. It was all true. Seldom do I believe the hype. Usually, my expectations are sadly left wanting in the world of new experiences that are supposed to overwhelm me. But Lambeau did not disappoint - the beer was cold, the roasted peanuts tasted better than ever, my Adams jersey fit in nicely, and not to be disappointed - Lambeau even offered an overly exuberant fan full of the local happy juice who was oddly entertaining when the action on the field was less that stellar. Through it all, I kept thinking about what the church could look like if we imported some Lambeau Leap experiences into Sunday worship. Green and gold robes for the choir and a scoreboard on the back wall with a countdown clock to the end of my sermon.

Imagine the fireworks when the sermon ends or the offering plate filled to overflowing after every worship service for the joy of just being present in this place. Not much talk or even thought for that matter of what reward awaits - though God reminds us of the promise often. No worries about climbing any ladders or stepping on others along the way to the top. The Kingdom of God rushes into our lives when the greatest serve the least - when the king is lifted up on a cross to save us all. Kind of puts James and John in their place. And maybe reminds us too - that the promise of God is for all of us - first, last, greatest, least, and every one of us in-between whether or not we can make it up the 5'11" wall for the Lambeau Leap. Thanks be to God! Amen.