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St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749
Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
October 24, 2021
22nd Sunday after Pentecost

Scripture Lessons: Hebrews 4:9-11; Mark 10:35-45

Hymns: 20; 363; 306:1,4,7; 309

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord
and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Isaiah 53:10-12

Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him; He has put *Him* to grief.

When You make His soul an offering for sin,

He shall see *His* seed, He shall prolong *His* days,

And the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in His hand.

¹¹ He shall see the labor of His soul, *and* be satisfied.

By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many,

For He shall bear their iniquities.

¹² Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the great,

And He shall divide the spoil with the strong,

Because He poured out His soul unto death,

And He was numbered with the transgressors,

And He bore the sin of many,

And made intercession for the transgressors. (NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth.
Amen.

In Christ Jesus, God our Savior, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: Who does the world see as being great?

Some might call out the names of the world leaders who are wielding great military power. Throughout world history there were names that stood out as being great because of their military power. Alexander the Great stands out for sure, but he was hardly the first or the last of world leaders to think of himself as being great. Nebuchadnezzar claimed glory for himself, only to be instantly humbled by the Lord.

Others would call out the names of the rich titans of industry and technology. Bill Gates, Tim Cook, Jeff Bezos, Mark Zuckerberg, or perhaps Elon Musk. All geniuses who wield enormous influence in the world. More than once Elon Musk has been cited for shaking the world stock markets by writing a tweet! They do what they can to shape events the way they want them to be, and it is impressive what they manage to do.

Many people are taken in by the attraction of such worldly power. Even Christians might have ambitions to such greatness. It is good for us to step back and hear the Word of the Lord and learn from our God who it is He considers to be great. May the Holy Spirit bless our meditation on His Word as we see how –

THEME: The Servant of the Lord Defines Greatness.

We begin with

I. Exposing the Vanity of Selfish Ambition.

We are all susceptible to the world's view of greatness. We see people succeed in their various fields of endeavor, whether it be entertainment, or sports, or business, or politics, whatever it might be, we see how they are rewarded. And we don't really have a problem with that because we live in a society where talent and hard work are rewarded. But then we can get caught up in it a little too much, and our selfish ambition kicks in, just like it does in the world. One may think this greatness in wealth and power is really something that matters, maybe matters more than anything else. One might even be tempted to think it matters more than spiritual concerns. We lose sight of the vanity of worldly greatness and wealth.

This is one of the flaws of our sinful human nature. It is hardly anything new with us. Indeed, it was a recurring problem among the twelve disciples of Jesus. Each of them wanted to be the greatest among the disciples, the one closest to Jesus with the most influence and power in His kingdom.

That same vanity manifested itself in a different way with one of the psalmists. By inspiration of the Holy Spirit the psalmist Asaph confessed his error for our learning:

“Truly God is good to Israel, To such as are pure in heart.

² But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled;

My steps had nearly slipped. ³ For I was envious of the boastful, When I saw the prosperity of the wicked. ...

⁸ They scoff and speak wickedly concerning oppression;

They speak loftily. ...

¹² Behold, these are the ungodly, Who are always at ease;

They increase in riches.” (Psalm 73:1-3,8,12)

Asaph confesses that he had lost sight of how the Lord is good to His people and blesses us as the Lord knows is best for us. Asaph was caught up in how good and easy the wicked of the world appear to have it in life. To Asaph it appeared they had all the wealth and power. Of course, it is all vanity. Not only does it remain true that they have problems too, but even if they didn't, lacking faith in Jesus they miss out on the greatest blessing of all which is eternal life.

He said he remembered the truth when he went to the Lord's house. And so it is for us also. It's when we come to church and hear the Word that we are reminded that everything we chase after in this world is passing away, and what lasts is our hope of heaven. The greatness of this world is actually an illusion. The glory and the greatness of this world quickly fades away.

Our text takes us in another direction. Our text directs our attention to a Servant, a lowly Servant for --

II. Revealing the Glory of Sacrificial Service.

Of course, you are correct in noting that this isn't just any servant. This is the Christ who is presented to us by Isaiah as the Servant of the Lord. This entire 53rd chapter of Isaiah details the intensity of

the suffering that was to be experienced by the Servant of the Lord as the One who would suffer and die for the sins of the world. The ordeal described is beyond imagining in its torments and also in the depth of its humiliation. There is nothing one might grasp onto as desirable for oneself to experience. No one looks on and declares, "Oh, I wish I could experience that!" No indeed, we are rather told that people would turn their faces away from Him as something that was too horrible to continue to look at.

In our gospel lesson Jesus made it clear to the disciples that this was what He, their Lord and Master, was here on earth to endure. Jesus understood what it would take to secure our salvation, to deliver us from sin and its curse. He said: "*For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.*" (Mark 10:45)

This was God's plan for our salvation as foretold in our text: "*It pleased the LORD to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief. ... You make His soul an offering for sin.*" (v. 10) This was the ultimate service Jesus came to fulfill. It goes far beyond anything we can comprehend. The Son of God endured the curse of God and the shame of our sin, to save us! He gave His life a ransom for the sinners of this world. This sacrifice took Jesus to such depths of spiritual suffering that He thought, "*But I am a worm, and no man; A reproach of men, and despised by the people.*" (Psalm 22:6) That is as humbling a service that there can be. There is nothing lowlier, or more necessary than that service performed for us by Jesus, the Servant of the LORD. He was cursed that we might be blessed.

It was all to be a great success. Jesus fulfilled all for our salvation. Isaiah prophesied in our text: "*By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many, For He shall bear their iniquities.*" (v.11)

What comes of this but proper recognition from the Lord. His Servant served perfectly. Jesus secured our salvation. We are justified, and God is well pleased. Jesus is glorified. Our text declares God's judgment on Jesus' mission of salvation: "*Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the great, And He shall divide the spoil with the strong,*

*Because He poured out His soul unto death,
And He was numbered with the transgressors,
And He bore the sin of many,
And made intercession for the transgressors.”* (v.12)

God declares Jesus to be great. God says Jesus wins! God says Jesus receives this recognition because He willingly went to the cross with transgressors and bore our sin to the cross, and interceded for sinners. Paul expressed this same truth with these words: *“God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, ¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, ¹¹ and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”* (Philippians 2:9-11) So we also, by faith glorify the name of Jesus, and joyfully bow before Him!

But what about the lesson concerning greatness? We should learn to aspire for such greatness as we have presented to us by Jesus. That is a hard lesson for our flesh to hear. As His disciples are we ready to aspire to greatness that comes only through such humble service and suffering? That is what Jesus lays before us in our gospel lesson: *“Whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. ⁴⁴ And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all.”* (Mark 10:43-44) Paul explains this attitude of faith with these words: *“Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. ⁴ Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. ⁵ Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.”*

(Philippians 2:3-5)

May all the selfish ambition that comes so naturally, and all the pride and conceit that drives our ego begone! May our hearts be filled with the love of Christ that we too might consider others before, yes, even BETTER than ourselves. When we, by the Spirit’s power and blessing, look out for the real interests of others, not to feed our own ego, but to secure a blessing for them, then we may indeed have the mind of Christ, and may know what it is the Lord sees as greatness in His kingdom.

AMEN.

And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.