Are you good at what you do? Just think of all the things you do every day. What is it that you do for a living? Would you say that you are good at it? Have you achieved greatness in your profession yet? What about the things you do outside of your job - are you good at those things? Some of you are husbands and wives. Are you a good at that? What would your spouse say? Maybe that is a loaded question. Some of you are parents - are you good at that? What about you who are sons and daughters - are you good to your parents? Have you achieved greatness in your life?

I think we would all like to be good at what we do, maybe even great at what we do. But how do you achieve that? What is greatness? Is it climbing to the top of the corporate ladder - becoming the pres of a large corporation or business? Is it becoming the most powerful person in town, or in Minnesota, or in our country - is that greatness? Whoever has the most money, the most comfortable life, the most friends - is that greatness?

Today Jesus speaks to us about the real definition of greatness. I think it will surprise you. We will see how Jesus is the ultimate example of greatness, and how you and I, no matter what our circumstances of life might be, can achieve greatness in everything we do.

Jesus talks about this shortly before Palm Sunday. The disciples could sense that things were intensifying for Jesus, that something big was going to happen. Two of Jesus' disciples, James and John, were wondering if Jesus was maybe about to overthrow the Roman government. Maybe Jesus would use his miraculous powers to reestablish the glorious kingdom of Israel, and Jesus would be in charge, and we, the 12 apostles, would be at his side, the 12 powerful vice-presidents.

James and John were getting excited about this possibility - they wanted to be #1 and 2 in Jesus' future kingdom. Their mother got involved and said to Jesus: Promise that in your kingdom these two sons of mine may sit, one on your right hand and one on your left hand. In other words, make my sons #1 and #2.

Jesus said to her: You do not know what you are asking. You do not know what my kingdom is. It is not an earthly kingdom. Greatness in Jesus' kingdom is not having lots of power on earth. Greatness in Jesus' kingdom is humility. It is sacrifice for others. That is why Jesus asked James and John: Are you able to you drink the cup I am about to drink? Can you experience the humility and sacrifice that I am about to go through? James and John did not understand and so they said: Sure we can.

Jesus responded by saying: You will indeed drink my cup. You will indeed experience humility and lowliness and sacrifice for others, But to sit on my right hand and on my left hand is not for me to give; rather these places belong to those for whom they hae been prepared by my Father. In Jesus' kingdom, he will have people sitting next to him, but those people are the ones who achieved greatness by humbling themselves and sacrificing themselves for others.

When the other 10 disciples heard that James and John were trying to get more power, they got upset. So Jesus called them together and explained to them what greatness really is: You know that the rulers of the nations lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. it will not be that way among you. The earthly definition of greatness is to have lots of power - to be able to boss other people around, but not with you, Jesus said. Instead whoever wants to become great among you will be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you will be your slave. A slave was someone who would wash other people's feet, get people their food and drink, clean up after people are done eating. That is greatness, Jesus said.

And then Jesus describes himself as the slave in the world: Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many. What made Jesus great was not his power. What made Jesus great was that placed himself below everybody - the slave of the world - and gave his life as a payment for all sin. That is greatness.

Jesus is telling us today that if you want to achieve greatness in whatever you do, then be a
servant, be a slave, to all the people in your life. Rather than striving for power at work, strive to serve all of your fellow employees and customers. That is greatness. And at home, you are not there to experience comfort and ease and to be waited on, you are there as a servant to your children, your spouse, your parents - you put yourself below them. That is greatness. Rather than think about my needs and my wants, I will put that aside and use my talents and abilities for other people's needs and wants – that is greatness. **Whoever wants to be first among you will be your slave.**

Why is this so hard to do? Isn't it because we are all naturally self-centered? Don't we all have sinful natures that want to be served? The world revolves around me. That attitude is in us when we first come into the world and we make our parents wait on us hand and foot, and we cry when we do not get our way. Eventually we grow up and gain our independence, but we still prefer it when everyone serves us. When I come home, and I want to lie down on the couch, and have my wife and children wait on me, hand and foot. That is selfish. When I go to work, I want everyone to bow down to me and do what I say - isn't that our sinful nature talking?

There is a certain part of us that wishes that every day was my birthday - that people would sing to me and give me presents and serve me. To have power, to enjoy comfort and ease as everyone serves you - that might be greatness in the eyes of the world, but that is pride and selfishness in the eyes of God. Haven't we all been guilty of these sins? A self-centered view of others - don't we all deserve to be punished by God for being so proud and self-centered in the way we deal with others?

But our God is greater than our sins. What does God do? He does something that is beyond my understanding - he takes my sins away. But how? God becomes my slave. He places himself below me. He lowers himself. He does not wash my feet with water. He washes my soul with his blood. God becomes the Son of Man, not to be served, but to serve you and me.

And what does he give me? His whole life as a ransom for many. This is what makes God so great. Yes, he is powerful. Yes, he is wise. But the most amazing thing is his love - his sacrificial love for the world. That is what makes God so great. That is what Jesus told his disciples that he was going to do at the beginning of our text for today: The Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and experts in the law. Notice how Jesus describes how low he's willing to go for you and me: They will condemn him to death. They will hand him over to the Gentiles to mock, flog, and crucify him.

What made Jesus so great? It was the fact that he became your slave, your servant. This is love, that God would stoop so low, to win your soul. And if you have any doubts that this is true, then Jesus adds that last promise to his disciples, that after three days he would rise again from the dead. Today, Jesus invites us to follow in his footsteps and pursue greatness his way. If you want to be great, Jesus says, then put yourself below all the people in your life, just as God put himself below you. Greatness is getting down on your hands and knees and tying child's shoe. Greatness is cutting your neighbor's grass as he recovers from surgery in the hospital. Greatness is helping your co-worker catch up at work because he has been sick for a few days. Greatness is listening to someone who just needs to talk, even when you are busy, because he has had a bad day and no one seems to care except for you.

Look around and say: **Who can I serve today?** Today I will love others, as Christ loved me – that is greatness. To be a servant to others, to be humble, lowly, to make sacrifices for others, not getting anything in return while you are here on this earth – that is greatness in the eyes of God. Amen.