

Dear Disciples of Jesus,

Emperor Nero is not well known by young people today. Those of us who heard of him in school may have forgotten about him. The man was a ruler of the ancient empire of Rome. He wanted power and fame. He is mostly remembered for his selfishness and his persecution of Christians. He was responsible, we believe, for the death of St. Paul.

St. Paul was called to be a missionary by Jesus to the people of the world. He spent the remainder of his life living selflessly for the spread of the Good news of Jesus as Savior. He was executed under Emperor Nero in about 67 A.D. St. Paul is remembered by millions of Christians over the centuries for his service to Jesus and his church.

People of the world would say, “If you want to be great, grab power and use it to make a name for yourself. You will be remembered.” Nero is hardly remembered today. Caesar Augustus accomplished more than Nero did and he is barely remembered today. St. Paul who followed Jesus and who served unselfishly is remembered all over the world.

Why am I making this contrast? Jesus does this in the Gospel reading.

God gives people the gift of ambition. Without ambition we would sit on the couch and do nothing.

Christians appreciate Jesus Christ’s ambition to come to earth and to be our Savior. In gratefulness we want to follow Jesus with ambition. But Jesus wants us to be careful. We have an example in Mark 10 of using ambition selfishly to pursue greatness.

Since this is a problem not just for two of his disciples, but the whole group, Jesus seizes an opportunity to teach his disciples about ambition and greatness in the kingdom of God. It isn’t that we should avoid it, but we need to go at it the right way. Hearing Jesus today we pray, **O Lord, Give Me Ambition for Christian Service!**

1. Christian service is different.

Christ teaches us: First, Christians service is different from the world’s service. Jesus emphasizes this when he tells the whole group, “**Not so with you.**” We are to think differently. Jesus inverts or turns around our thoughts

about service and the path to greatness.

A. What Jesus reveals is that greatness in his kingdom is attained through service and suffering.

1. When James, John and their mother come to Jesus, they are not thinking about suffering. In fact they are thinking of the opposite. They are thinking, *“Jesus give us glory and power and then you will see how we can serve you.”* This is revealed in their request to have seats of honor on his right and left. They assumed that Jesus kingdom would be revealed visibly on earth. Like most kings Jesus would need some faithful followers close by to help him manage the kingdom. The reaction of the ten apostles later tells us that they were thinking the same as James and John.

2. Jesus explains, **“38 “You don’t know what you are asking,” Jesus said. “Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?” (38)** The cup is a cup of suffering. Once when I was sick, I had to drink bitter medicine that tasted awful. My mother stood by and made sure I drank the whole little cup full, because “it was good for me.” In Baptism, water is poured on a person. A baptism of suffering is a pouring out of suffering on a person. Jesus referred to his sufferings and death as a bitter cup he had to drink and a baptism of suffering he had to undergo.

Jesus is telling his disciples that the path of service and that path to glory involves bitter and sometimes overwhelming amounts of suffering.

Our Savior has another difference he highlights.

B. Greatness in Jesus’ kingdom is not found in grabbing power and lording it over others. It comes through humbling ourselves and serving others.

1. The difficulty for us is that we see Caesar Augustus, we see rulers today and business leaders and we think, *“That is the way it is done.”* At times in the home and in the church, we may think, *“The only way to get things done is to grab power, to takeover a program and not ask permission, but do things our way.”* Jesus warns that is not the Christian way.

2. Greatness is defined as serving others. Being first is being the slave of all. We can have a voice in the church. We can take authority that is given to us and use it for good. However, we start with the understanding, *“I am here to serve. I am not the only one who knows how to do things or the only who can get things done.”* If we humbly serve and put others first, Jesus tells us this is great in his eyes and it is beneficial to the kingdom.

C. **“We can,” they answered. (39)** Yet when Jesus was betrayed and put to

death, they ran like scared rabbits. They weren't ready.

We need to prayerfully consider what the Lord is asking everyone of his disciples. He is saying that the path of a Christian in this life is not glorious and it is actually hard and sometimes painful. New Christians have fallen away, once the reality of Christian suffering and service entered their life.

The answer lies in God's powerful word. God prepares us for service and suffering by speaking plainly of it to us. **"Take up your cross and follow me."** Those same words provide the power to do what he commands. He promises to be with us. He promises to help us. He promises, despite suffering and sometimes long hours of seemly fruitless work, that in the end it will all work out. Some day in heaven we will see the glory that he attaches to humble, persistent service that we give. God's word is the key to keep us going.

2. Christian service is Christlike.

Jesus encouraged his disciples to serve in his kingdom. He set the example. Soon he would serve them personally by washing their feet at the Last Supper. He would do the work of the lowest servant and they would benefit. Christ teaches us: Secondly, Christian service is Christlike.

A. Jesus explains, **"For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."** (45)

1. Jesus served in his life and ministry. Jesus did more than wash the feet of the disciples. Matthew reports, **"He touched her hand and the fever left her, and she got up and began to wait on him. When evening came, many who were demon-possessed were brought to him, and he drove out the spirits with a word and healed all the sick."** (Matthew 8:15-16)

2. Jesus serves you and I as well. He answers our earnest prayers in sickness and trouble. His greatest service of all was undergoing the **"baptism"** that he mentions to James and John. Suffering was poured out at the cross. Jesus paid for us selfishly pursuing greatness and our lack of desire to serve others. In that flood of suffering God's judgement against you and me was satisfied. **One** holy Savior did this for the **"many"** sinners, that is the world.

B. This wonderful Savior and salvation is our reason for serving. We don't have to worry about greatness. We will share in Jesus' glory in heaven.

1. In the mean time we have work to do. I want to suggest that very often service for Jesus is ordinary service. In asking his disciples to wash each

other's feet, he was asking them to do something that they could all do. Look at service that way. Jesus wants you to do every day, ordinary things that will help others and especially shine the light on him. This we can do.

As part of that ordinary and every day service we should also try to speak of Jesus. We can speak to our fellow Christians. We can speak to those who don't know him. In washing his disciples' feet, Jesus was showing his love for them. In speaking to others about our God and Savior, we can clearly communicate his love for those people.

2. At times we will suffer for Jesus. He told James and John, **“You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with”** (40) Sometimes it may be verbal abuse, sometimes its loss of opportunity. Whatever happens Jesus will help us. We have the Counselor the Holy Spirit. Jesus also promises to be with us. The Father promises to answer our prayers. We can be like the apostles in the book of Acts who after receiving a beating rejoiced that they had been considered worthy to suffer for the name of Jesus. (Acts 5:41)

Conclusion: Matthew Potter, was a confirmation student years ago. Matt was a swimmer. He was good. He raced in a regional swim meet and in seventh grade and he beat two college men in a race. Matt was a Christian blessed with ability and ambition. One practice, his swim team was exhausted laying on the side of the pool. His coach, a Russian Olympian, challenged them. Who would get in the pool and do more laps? The only person to raise his hand was Matt. Not only did he swim more laps, but the coach took a bucket to the back of his swim trunks and he swam with that dragging behind him. In confirmation I spoke to Matt about his extraordinary gift and I encouraged him to look for opportunities to use his gifts to serve and witness for Jesus.

Jesus is calling you and me today to use the gift of ambition to serve. He wants us to ambitiously serve him and others. This is how he defines the pursuit of greatness. In serving others we will live a great life. We don't have to do this to earn salvation. Jesus already did that by laying down his life for everyone. Now in Jesus, we are saved to serve. Amen.

General Thought: This Sunday we see again the striking difference between a Christian and a worshiper of the false gods of this world. The difference is in the way the way that the Christian looks at ambition. No one should be more ambitious than we are. This Sunday that ambition and the reasons for it are defined.

Context: James and John come with their mother, Salome, to ask a favor of Jesus. (Matthew 19) Previously Jesus has spoken of 12 thrones next to his. (Matthew 19:28) The mother and her sons are ambitious and want the prime seats for the two men. Their desire to serve Jesus is good.

They do not, however, understand the path to greatness is through suffering. To not suffer is to not be a part of the kingdom. Jesus assures John and James that they will suffer for Christ.

Messianic Context: Suffering for the kingdom is modeled by Christ. However, his suffering was exceptional as he lay down his one life as a ransom for the “many”.

Malady: The path to greatness with Jesus is not in getting others to serve us.

Propositional Statement: Jesus tells us the path to greatness is through sacrificial service. We pray that his exceptional service, moves us to ambitiously serve others.

First Lesson Isaiah 53:10-12

10 Yet it was the Lord’s will to crush him and cause him to suffer,
and though the Lord makes[a] his life an offering for sin,
he will see his offspring and prolong his days,
and the will of the Lord will prosper in his hand.

11 After he has suffered,
he will see the light of life[b] and be satisfied[c];
by his knowledge[d] my righteous servant will justify many,
and he will bear their iniquities.

12 Therefore I will give him a portion among the great,[e]
and he will divide the spoils with the strong,[f]
because he poured out his life unto death,
and was numbered with the transgressors.

For he bore the sin of many,
and made intercession for the transgressors.

Footnotes:

Isaiah 53:10 Hebrew though you make

Isaiah 53:11 Dead Sea Scrolls (see also Septuagint); Masoretic Text does not have the light of life.

Isaiah 53:11 Or (with Masoretic Text) 11 He will see the fruit of his suffering / and will be satisfied

Isaiah 53:11 Or by knowledge of him

Isaiah 53:12 Or many

Isaiah 53:12 Or numerous

2 Chronicles 26:16-23

16 But after Uzziah became powerful, his pride led to his downfall. He was unfaithful to the Lord his God, and entered the temple of the Lord to burn incense on the altar of incense. 17 Azariah the priest with eighty other courageous priests of the Lord followed him in. 18 They confronted King Uzziah and said, “It is not right for you, Uzziah, to burn incense to the Lord. That is for the priests, the descendants of Aaron, who have been consecrated to burn incense. Leave the sanctuary, for you have been unfaithful; and you will not be honored by the Lord God.”

19 Uzziah, who had a censer in his hand ready to burn incense, became angry. While he was raging at the priests in their presence before the incense altar in the Lord’s temple, leprosy[a] broke out on his forehead. 20 When Azariah the chief priest and all the other priests looked at him, they saw that he had leprosy on his forehead, so they hurried him out. Indeed, he himself was eager to leave, because the Lord had afflicted him.

21 King Uzziah had leprosy until the day he died. He lived in a separate house[b]—leprous, and banned from the temple of the Lord. Jotham his son had charge of the palace and governed the people of the land.

22 The other events of Uzziah’s reign, from beginning to end, are recorded by the prophet Isaiah son of Amoz. 23 Uzziah rested with his ancestors and was buried near them in a cemetery that belonged to the kings, for people said, “He had leprosy.” And Jotham his son succeeded him as king.

Footnotes:

2 Chronicles 26:19 The Hebrew for leprosy was used for various diseases affecting the skin; also in verses 20, 21 and 23.

2 Chronicles 26:21 Or in a house where he was relieved of responsibilities

Second Lesson Hebrews 4:9-16

9 There **remains**, then, a **Sabbath-rest for the people of God**; 10 for anyone who enters God’s rest also rests from their works,[a] just as God did from his. 11 Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will perish by following their example of disobedience.

12 For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. 13 Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

Jesus the Great High Priest

14 Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven,[b] Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. 15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. 16 Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

Footnotes:

Hebrews 4:10 Or labor

Hebrews 4:14 Greek has gone through the heavens

1 Corinthians 9:7-12, 19-23

7 Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat its grapes? Who tends a flock and does not drink the milk? 8 Do I say this merely on human authority? Doesn't the Law say the same thing? 9 For it is written in the Law of Moses: "Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain."^[a] Is it about oxen that God is concerned? 10 Surely he says this for us, doesn't he? Yes, this was written for us, because whoever plows and threshes should be able to do so in the hope of sharing in the harvest. 11 If we have sown spiritual seed among you, is it too much if we reap a material harvest from you? 12 If others have this right of support from you, shouldn't we have it all the more?

But we did not use this right. On the contrary, we put up with anything rather than hinder the gospel of Christ.

Paul's Use of His Freedom

19 Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. 20 To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. 21 To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. 22 To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. 23 I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.

Footnotes: 1 Corinthians 9:9 Deut. 25:4

Gospel Mark 10:35-45

35 Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him. "Teacher," they said, "we want you to do for us whatever we ask."

36 "What do you want me to do for you?" he asked.

37 They replied, "Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory."

38 "You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said. "Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?"

39 "We can," they answered.

Jesus said to them, "You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with, 40 but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those

for whom they have been prepared.”

41 When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John. 42 Jesus called them together and said, “You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. 43 Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, 44 and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. 45 For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”