

©All Rights Reserved

9/23/2012 First Presbyterian of Allegan "Big Little Ones"

Genesis 16:1-16 Hagar. Conceived. Mistreated, ran away. Angel of the Lord found her. Promise by God. She names God.

Mark 9:30-37

³⁰ They left that place and passed through Galilee. Jesus did not want anyone to know where they were, ³¹ because he was teaching his disciples. He said to them, "The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. They will kill him, and after three days he will rise." ³² But they did not understand what he meant and were afraid to ask him about it.

³³ They came to Capernaum. When he was in the house, he asked them, "What were you arguing about on the road?" ³⁴ But they kept quiet because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest.

³⁵ Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, "If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all."

³⁶ He took a little child and had him stand among them. Taking him in his arms, he said to them, ³⁷ "Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me."

©All Rights Reserved

If you go to the internet, and you ask Google what the greatest movie of all time is, you will get a variety of answers. The answer to that question is “It depends on who you ask.” --American Movie Classics movie guide rates *The Godfather*, (the 2 film series) as the best movie of all time. The internet movie database disagrees. It ranks, by popular internet vote, *The Shawshank Redemption*, as the best movie of all time. Even before the internet was even invented, opinions seemed to differ. The international film community from 1962- 2002 ranked the 1941 Orsen Wells movie, *Citizen Kane*, as the greatest American film ever made. Wikipedia also lists some general audience polls by Harris Interactive of the best films ever made. Topping that polling list until 2008 was the 1939 classic film, *Gone with the Wind*. --The fact that there are so many opinions as to what is the greatest movie is no surprise to us. We understand that tastes change and that people have their personal preferences. And of course, everyone is convinced that their personal favorite is the best movie ever.

This is pretty much the situation of what was going on in our passage today. Jesus is walking along the road, and the group of disciples, the men and women who left everything to follow him around in his ministry are walking down the road as well. There seems to be quite a group of

©All Rights Reserved

disciples at this point, because while Jesus knows that there is some sort of argument that was going on in the group, he still asks the disciples about it once they reach Capernum. The disciples of course are embarrassed about their argument, and they say nothing. Can't you just image them at this point, kind of hanging their heads like guilty children and stealing side glances at each other with annoyed looks? They knew that the argument that they were having was a stupid one, and they did not want to admit that they had done it.

But Jesus, ever the teacher, takes this opportunity for a lesson. He sits down in the manner of first Century Hebrew Rabbi's, and he calls for The Twelve to come to him from out of the group of the male and female disciples. --These twelve men, symbolic of twelve new tribes of Israel, are not only those closest to Jesus, I bet that they were also the ones who were probably guilty of starting this argument amongst the disciples. And then comes today's lesson: "If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant (or slave) of all."

--Huh? What in the world did Jesus mean by that? After all, Jesus and the disciples lived in First Century Palestine, a society that was dominated by the Roman system of rank, status and privilege. At the very

©All Rights Reserved

top of Roman society was the Roman Emperor, and then the nobility.

Below that were the senators and the equestrians, the people who made and enforced the laws, men who wore special togas with purple stripes and gold rings to proclaim their status. All of these people were selected individuals from the larger class of Patricians, men who were free citizens of Rome and who enjoyed their wealth, land owning status, privileges and power. Below the Patricians, you had the Plebians, the multitude of free men who may not have been citizens, but who paid their taxes and lived under Roman rule. Many of the disciples, and Jesus himself would fit into that category. –But that wasn't the end to the stratification of Roman society. Below the multitude of free men, you had an entire group of people who were slaves. While it was possible to move out of slavery and become free, it was not very easy in that society. And within all of these hugely stratified levels of society, you had the patriarchal system, where the males were above the women, and the women were above the children. So in our passage today, when Jesus brings a little child out among the twelve and stands them up in front of the twelve disciples, the context hints that we should not image this kid to be some wealthy freeman's child, a senators son or someone who was born with the proverbial silver spoon in his mouth. Instead we should imagine the young

©All Rights Reserved

child of a slave, a child so young that it's gender isn't even indicated by the text. And Jesus sets this child in the middle of the group of power hungry men, who were arguing about their status and position among Jesus followers and Jesus uses the child as a living object lesson. "This child", Jesus tells them, "is who you should welcome and honor. It is the favor of those who are ignored and who are forgotten on the bottom rungs of society who you should treat with the greatest honor and the respect. -- That power and honor and status and position that you desire for yourselves, the titles that you politically maneuver and posture to the movers and shakers of society for, forget doing that. --If you want to be great in God's kingdom, you give that welcome and honor to people like this lowly child of nobody instead. --This is who is considered great and important in God's kingdom."

You see, in God's kingdom your job title is meaningless and the status that you have in your context is worthless. It doesn't matter in God's kingdom if you gain a commendation from the emperor or if you are invited to sit with the rich and powerful. You don't need to have the college degrees or the appropriate credentials. What matters in the kingdom of God is your loving service to those who are forgotten, and left out in the

©All Rights Reserved

cold. What matters in God's kingdom is what you do, not where other people say you belong.

This past week, an amazing thing happened in Winnipeg Canada. Now Winnipeg is located about 50 miles north of the United States, straight up from the border of our states of North Dakota and Minnesota. And the weather up that way is a bit colder than what we have been experiencing here in Michigan. And on Monday morning, the route 24 city bus driver, Kris Doubledee was watching the sidewalks for people who were at or were heading for one of his bus stops. As he was watching the sidewalks in downtown Winnipeg near the corner of Portage and Main street, at about 7:40 am Kris noticed a man with dreadlocks and tattered clothes who was crossing the street in front of him. The man was barefoot. His heart went out to him. He prayed, "Lord, just ease his pain"; and as Kris drove the rest of his route, he thought about this man who was not wearing shoes.

Tuesday morning dawned, and it was a particularly cold day for September, only 41 degrees Fahrenheit. And as Kris was driving his route, right about the same place and time, when he saw the barefoot man again --shuffling down the street, still with no shoes. It was apparent that his feet were cold and sore. On Tuesday, Kris did not just drive on past. He turned

©All Rights Reserved

on his four way flashers, pulled the bus over, opened the door and yelled out, "Hey Buddy!" The man paused. Kris didn't hesitate; he got out of his bus and went over to the man. The passengers in the city bus also stopped what they were doing and looked over at this unscheduled stop and the unorthodox situation of their bus driver out of the bus, talking to a man on the sidewalk.

Kris said to the guy, "Where's your shoes?" The man replied, "I don't have any." Kris said, "If I give you a pair of shoes will you keep them?" The man replied simply, "Yes." So Kris took off his shoes right there on the sidewalk and handed them to the man. As the man stood there with a shocked look on his face, Kris patted him on the shoulder and walked back to his driver's seat on the bus and pulled back onto his route, driving in his socks, working to get his passengers to their stops on time.

But it was not back to the usual for the passengers on the bus. Everyone on the bus was stunned into silence. Many passengers, including, Denise Campbell had tears in her eyes. "O my God", she said herself, "What did I just see?" Another passenger got up and walked to the front of the bus to talk to their driver. "Why did you do that?" She asked

©All Rights Reserved

Kris. Kris' response was simple. "It was cold and he needed shoes." The woman responded. "That is the most amazing thing that I have ever seen."

After one of the passengers Denise Campbell got off at her stop near her work, she told her co-workers what she had just witnessed. Later that day, she wrote the story up and posted it on a community news blog. Immediately the people of Winnepeg began to clamor to find out the name of the kindhearted bus driver. News organizations began their hunt to try to figure out who he was. For two days, Kris kept a low profile and tried to avoid the spotlight. --To his way of thinking, what he did was nothing special. It was just an old pair of shoes. But the news agencies finally found him and he accepted the invitation to tell his story and to talk about his simple theology and his kind action. "Of course I believe in God." He replied in answer to a question. And he continued. "And I believe in all of us, that we all need to take care of each other." When asked how we should do that, Kris had the simplest of answers. "Just slow down a bit and pay attention to your brother and sister, and help them out," was the advice from this kind bus driver.

In conclusion, while it may seem normal for us to live in a world where everyone is constantly trying to prove that they are the greatest and

©All Rights Reserved

the best and the most deserving of recognition, and praise. While we may concern ourselves with the lives of the rich and the famous and the beautiful and long to be exactly like them, it is a story like this that makes us stop and realize that as Christians we really are called to follow a very different example. We are to be the servant of all. We are to look after the least and the lowliest and the forgotten of this world as if they were God's dignitaries. This is our job description. I don't know about you, but today, I want to be exactly like a bus driver from Winnipeg, Canada. I want to model my life to a different standard, one that makes a difference. Amen.

Copyright Rev. Karen Fitz La Barge All Rights Reserved