

WEEK TWO September 19 2021 Be For Others

I'm a big fan of documentaries -

I especially like the ones made by Ken Burns.

Thirty years ago he made a series on the Civil War that I'll watch at least once a year.

Well, Burns has a new documentary which premieres this Sunday night on PBS.

SCREEN: Muhammad Ali pic

The subject: Muhammad Ali.

For anyone who doesn't know him,

here is a two sentence description on Ali's Wikipedia page:

boxer, activist, entertainer, poet, and philanthropist.

He is widely regarded as one of the most significant and

celebrated figures of the 20th century,

and is frequently ranked as the best heavyweight boxer of all time.

After winning the heavyweight title Ali famously declared,

"I am the greatest!"

He retired from boxing in 1981.

Then three years later was diagnosed with Parkinsons.

It was a blow that could have been a knockout.

But Ali found new ways to be great.

The rest of his life was devoted to others.

He used his voice to draw attention to poverty, racism and injustice.

In 1996 he received one of the sports world's highest honors, lighting the flame at the start of the Olympic Games in Atlanta.

Muhammad Ali died in 2016.

I am the greatest!

How do you determine greatness?

And how does someone achieve it?

Is it how many titles an athlete wins,

how much money a person makes,

how many Twitter followers someone has?

The world uses these things to measure greatness,
but they are all fleeting.

How do you measure greatness?

SCREEN: Back to the Future main screen

This is week two of our Fall message series titled,
Back to the Future.

We're preaching on how we can move forward from all
the challenges and losses of the past two years.

The scripture readings each week give us a lesson
on how we do this.

Last week we heard that we need to *be for God*.

Today's lesson is that we need to *be for others*.

And today's Gospel reading tells us how.

So we heard that Jesus's Apostles once argued among themselves
about who was the greatest.

Jesus sat them down and said this:

**SCREEN: If anyone wishes to be first,
he shall be the last of all and the servant of all.**

His message was pretty clear:

to be my disciple, you must be different.

Different from how other people in the world live.

And the standard - the yardstick -

God uses to measure greatness is serving others.

So it's not how much money you make or how much power you have.

Not fame, or awards or the number of followers on social media.

No, Jesus's message to his Apostles is a message for anyone who would follow him:
greatness is found in serving others.

And this must challenge each of us to answer the question:

SCREEN: Am I living for myself or others?

Is my life all about me?

My wants, my desires, my needs, my comfort?

Am I living for myself or am I living for others?

What is needed to be for others?

First, it requires you to let go of your ego.

When someone is egotistical, they've made life all about ME.

They are the center and everyone else orbits around them.

Those who want to please God and follow Christ
move themselves out of the center and put other people there.

Life revolves around them, not the other way around.

When you let go of your ego and making life all about you,
you now make time for others, you listen to them,
respond to their needs, you help them to succeed
and give them opportunities to shine.

All ways that you can be for them.

Isn't this what parents do every day in so many ways?

Or in a family with a member who has special needs?

Be for others.

One image that popped into my mind as I was writing this message
was a horse race.

In a horse race they put blinders on the animals.

The blinders direct their vision forward and
keep them from getting distracted by the other horses.

Some people can go through life with blinders on -
only seeing what is directly ahead for them,
only what is in their path.

It can lead to being self-centered and egotistical and
blind to the needs of others.

It can happen to any of us when we become consumed
by our goals and where we are headed in life.

When the blinders come off, we suddenly see more of the world around us.

We see other people.

Life stops being all about "me" and becomes about "you".

SCREEN: blank red background

Sometimes it takes a wake up call for this conversion to happen.

The wake up call could come in the form of a health emergency, a family crisis, or a pandemic.

Over the past two years,

I think many of us had our blinders removed and were reminded of what life is all about.

We re-discovered the importance of family and friends, co-workers and classmates.

And while this may be one of the silver linings of the past two years, in other ways, the world became more divided and relationships were tested like never before.

One of the great challenges in our day when it comes to being for others is embracing people we disagree with or who make poor choices or even those we might avoid or resent.

As Jesus taught, it's so easy to be with people who like us and praise us and always say how great we are.

The real test for disciples when it comes to being for others is being with those who disagree or argue with us or even seem to hate us.

So let me ask you:

in your daily life, despite your best intentions, do you ever set yourself up to be in opposition to others?

We all do, don't we?

Sometimes in little ways like how we drive or interact with strangers.

To bigger ways like always having to be right or have the last word or not owning up to our mistakes or not cleaning up messes we make.

Something I touched on in last week's message but bears repeating is that if you are someone who feels a need to telegraph your anger and frustration to the whole world, either in your conversations or through social media,

you'll always be in opposition to some people.

And be honest, does it ever really help?

Does it fix things, convert others,
make the world a more gentle and loving place?

Of course not!

In our second reading today,

St. James talked about the conflicts within us and
gave us the remedy for resolving them, calling us to be:

SCREEN: peaceable, gentle, compliant,

full of mercy and good fruits,

without inconstancy or insincerity.

Think of it, he wrote this 2000 years ago.

So the challenges of being for others are age old.

The delivery systems for our anger and outrage may be modern,
the problems are not.

I want to offer a practical step you can take to make
today's message more concrete for you.

To help you to truly be for others and become great in God's eyes,
I want to challenge you in the coming week to serve one person,
anonymously, each day.

Anonymously: so they can't thank you, pay you back, or praise you.

Help a family member without them knowing it.

Do something nice for a neighbor.

Contribute to a cause or project.

Check out opportunities to serve in our weekly bulletin.

Another important person from the 20th century,

Dr. Martin Luther King once said this about greatness:

SCREEN: Everyone can be great, because everyone can serve. -MLK

For those who want to follow Jesus, not only can we serve, we must.

This week, find ways to serve and be for others,

that you may become great in the eyes of God. Amen. +