

WEEKLY SERMON

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Bigger, better, best!

Last weekend, I was invited to join some friends at the Southampton International Boat Show. It was an eye-opening experience showcasing everything from stand-up paddleboards to sail boats and superyachts. Whilst wandering around the purpose-built marina, I marvelled at the hundreds of boats, and it struck me how the ones that cost the equivalent of the average semi-detached house in Lancashire actually looked relatively small next to the many larger models displayed. The way that things were presented surely encouraged a 'bigger, better, best' mindset!

In Sunday's Gospel reading (*Mark 9:30-37*), the disciples were concerned with being the best. They were enjoying the recognition which came with being associated with Jesus and were jockeying for position, keen to create a hierarchy amongst the group. Jesus' response to the disciples and their comparisons was that true greatness in the kingdom of God is found not in power and prestige, but in service, saying, "Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last." This was not something that came naturally to the disciples and it certainly doesn't come naturally to us! Our modern society widely values being famous, influential, powerful and wealthy, seeking to be 'bigger, better, best'.

To reinforce his directive, Jesus took a small child and told the disciples, "Anyone who welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me. And anyone who welcomes me also welcomes the one who sent me." In Jesus' time, children had almost no value at all. They were seen as a burden until they were old enough to contribute to the family, so what Jesus was saying sent a strong message. If the child is a symbol of vulnerability, powerlessness, and dependency, then how we treat the weak and the vulnerable echoes our relationship with him. Greatness is not found in what we have accomplished and never puts itself in a position of superiority over another. It is not about our bank balance, our house, our job, our car (or boat!), our accomplishments or our reputation. Greatness comes when we share with others who have nothing to share in return. Greatness comes when we forgive someone who has neither asked for our forgiveness nor changed their behaviour. So, let's think about those who Jesus has set before us, because how we treat the least, last, and lost is how we achieve the greatness of the servant of all.

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