



ACCORDING TO MATTHEW

Matthew 18:1-14, *Common English Bible*

At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?”

² Then he called a little child over to sit among the disciples, ³ and said, “I assure you that if you don’t turn your lives around and become like this little child, you will definitely not enter the kingdom of heaven. ⁴ Those who humble themselves like this little child will be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. ⁵ Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.

⁶ “As for whoever causes these little ones who believe in me to trip and fall into sin, it would be better for them to have a huge stone hung around their necks and be drowned in the bottom of the lake. ⁷ How terrible it is for the world because of the things that cause people to trip and fall into sin! Such things have to happen, but how terrible it is for the person who causes those things to happen! ⁸ If your hand or your foot causes you to fall into sin, chop it off and throw it away. It’s better to enter into life crippled or lame than to be thrown into the eternal fire with two hands or two feet. ⁹ If your eye causes you to fall into sin, tear it out and throw it away. It’s better to enter into life with one eye than to be cast into a burning hell with two eyes.

¹⁰ “Be careful that you don’t look down on one of these little ones. I say to you that their angels in heaven are always looking into the face of my Father who is in heaven. ¹² What do you think? If someone had one hundred sheep and one of them wandered off, wouldn’t he leave the ninety-nine on the hillsides and go in search for the one that wandered off? ¹³ If he finds it, I assure you that he is happier about having that one sheep than about the ninety-nine who didn’t wander off. ¹⁴ In the same way, my Father who is in heaven doesn’t want to lose one of these little ones.

DISCUSSION STARTER:

In 1999, Kenny Rogers released the song, “I Am the Greatest.” It is about a boy who believes himself to be the greatest baseball player ever. He tells himself over and over that he is the greatest. He picks the ball up and pitches to himself, expecting to hit the ball out of his imaginary field. He ends up striking himself out. The song ends with:

*Now it's suppertime and his momma calls,
Little boy starts home with his bat and ball.*

*Says, "I am the greatest, that is a fact,
But even I didn't know I could pitch like that!"*

*Says, "I am the greatest, that is understood,
But even I didn't know I could pitch that good!"*

The little boy wanted to be the greatest, but his definition of what it meant to be great had to change.

In today’s reading, Jesus does much the same: he redefines greatness for the disciples.

How do you define greatness? How is greatness defined in the culture around you?

Greatness is often defined by wealth, power, money or access to other resources. These things very often define what it means to be secure and successful and powerful. Jesus challenges this idea of greatness by pointing to a child and saying, “those who humble themselves like this little child will be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven” (18:4).

What does it mean to be humble?

In 1733, John Wesley published a small book entitled *A Collection of Forms of Prayer, For Every Day in the Week*. The book offered daily morning and evening prayers and reflection questions about one’s spiritual and relational health. The morning questions were consistent throughout the week. The evening questions changed daily. The questions for Tuesday evening related to humility. Here are a few questions, written by Wesley, for you to consider as you seek to be the greatest in God’s kingdom by being humble:

- Have I labored to conform all my thoughts, words, and actions to these fundamental maxims: “I am nothing, I have nothing, I can do nothing?”
- Have I ascribed to myself any part of any good which God did by my hand?
- Have I desired the praise of [others]?
- Have I taken pleasure in it?
- Have I despised any one’s advice?