

**I, Roger, a servant of the people of God.**

**To God's children at St. John's Episcopal Church.**

**Grace, peace, and mercy to you in your Pentecost season of rejoicing!**

**I give profound thanks for you, dear people of God. Your faith continues in the midst of challenging times: the destruction of your place of worship by fire; financial struggles closing your school; a pandemic that closed you down, separated you, and continues to infect your people; death of many of those whom you love, and property that is worn and failing. In the midst of all that, you stand at the corner of First Avenue and Kearny Street in Chula Vista as a beacon of hope and the presence of God's love not only for your surrounding neighborhoods, but for all neighborhoods, all peoples. Your acts of mercy, kindness, and generosity emanate from this city and stretch across many boundaries. Your sense of acceptance and welcome is both empowering and life-giving.**

**The task, set before you and me today, is to continue in the faith that drives these acts of holiness, growing in trust, and giving thanks without end. Faith is an indescribable thing. It might seem to some to be a burden. But true faith, lived in communion with the Church and the saints who have gone before us, lifts weight from our shoulders. True faith allows us to trust that, while we might not understand or even like the direction in which the Holy Spirit leads, we can nevertheless follow with a certainty that all shall be well. We believe, that in following, we give up personal ownership of the Church's mission and we gain a share in communal ownership of our mission. Faith draws us together and shows us that, while we cannot see or know the future, it is assured in the loving embrace of Jesus Christ for all of us. Together, we are His Body, the Church.**

**Jesus has been teaching his disciples about this faith by saying, “*The Son of Man is to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him, and three days after being killed, he will rise again.*” But they did not understand what he was saying and were afraid to ask him. So instead, they begin to argue. And when asked about their disagreement, they were silent (perhaps embarrassed) because they were arguing about who is the greatest.**

**Maybe it was Simon and Andrew claiming greatness because they were the first disciples called – seniority must matter.**

**Maybe Peter argued it should be him because he was the only one to correctly answer Jesus, stating, “You are the Messiah” – having the right answers.**

**Maybe Peter, James, and John claimed it to be one of them because they were to ones asked to go up the Mount of Transfiguration – positioned and connected in high places.**

**Maybe John argued that he was the greatest because he was the beloved disciple who laid his head on Jesus’ breast – a position of honor.**

**The past two weeks I had my own internal argument about being striven to greatness. I knew that I was having a surgical procedure this past Monday. Yet, I argued about who I am with myself:**

- This is just a simple procedure – quickly in and out – and no one will be the wiser. And, I will immediately resume my regular schedule.**
- I am an educated and experienced nurse – certainly I know how to care for myself.**
- I am strong – a minor outpatient surgery can’t hold me down**
- I am your Rector, a position of importance, and there is much work to be done.**

And so, embarrassed by what I was thinking and my own self argument – I, like the disciples, was mostly silent. And, for that, I humbly apologize.

In this moment, I completely misunderstood what greatness is really about. Jesus challenges what we think and have been told about greatness.

*“Whoever want to be first must be last of all and servant of all”*

What if greatness is not about the position or place we occupy, but about the space and place we offer others? What if greatness in Jesus’ mind is not about how much we have or what we have accomplished, but about what we’ve offered and done for others?

Jesus is not saying that we should not or cannot be great. He never says that. Rather, he is asking us to reframe our understanding of greatness.

*What does it mean and look like for you and me to be great in today’s world?*

Jesus answers that question by taking a little child in his arms and saying to the disciples, “Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.”

Let us be careful here. Jesus does not say that greatness is in “being a child” and he doesn’t say that greatness is in “being childlike”.

Greatness is in “welcoming the child”.

Now that doesn’t sound too difficult or challenging. Who wouldn’t welcome a little child? But Jesus isn’t talking about the child. He’s talking about what the child represents.

The child is a symbol for something else. The child is a symbol of vulnerability, powerlessness, and dependency.

**The child in Jesus' day had no rights, no status, no economic value. Greatness, Jesus says, is in welcoming and receiving into our arms one like this, regardless of his or her age.**

**Greatness never puts itself in a position of superiority over another. It is not about me; my nation, my tribe, my people, my religion, my politics, my bank account, my house, my job, my accomplishments, my reputation, my status. Our greatness is revealed in our service and care of others regardless of her or his ability or willingness to pay, repay, or return the favor.**

**Your greatness was experienced by me last week when I took 35 bags of your clothing and 7 suits on hangers to the Clothing and Food Pantry at St. Mark's Episcopal Church in City Heights. A young man picked out one of Mark Higginbotham's suits and a pair of dress shoes. The look of pride and joy on his face spoke volumes in words of gratitude.**

**Greatness comes to us when we share with others who have nothing to share with us.**

**Greatness comes when we forgive one who has neither asked for our forgiveness nor changed his or her behavior.**

**Greatness is not something to be achieved or earned. It is a quality that arises within us when our lives are in balance and we step into our better selves.**

**So dear, holy People of God: being lifted up in Spirit, Jesus is calling forth greatness in our words and actions – to be people of authenticity, honesty, and integrity.**

**Today, you and I are reminded of who we are and have been proclaimed to be – the Beloved Children of God.**

**Following the reading of this letter, you will have a holy opportunity. You will be asked, once again, to reaffirm your faith and come to this Holy Table to receive the Bread of Life. It is meant to remind us who we are: a Beloved Community shaped anew in our faith; and a holy people, the Body of Christ, given to be a joyful light that we carry into the world.**

**I ask you to pray for the Church universal, for our country and world tortured by conflict and division, and for our parish and our mutual ministries.**

**And, my Dear Ones, pray for me as I pray for you.**

**And now, the grace and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.**