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Have you ever been in line at an airport checking your luggage?...Even if you haven't, ...you'll appreciate this true story....A very well-dressed man was in a long line to check his luggage & he was getting very impatient because it was moving so slowly...He finally got so upset that he went to the front of the line & yelled at the baggage attendant: "Can't you work any faster...I shouldn't have to wait in this line. I've got a first class ticket."...When the attendant explained that he had to wait his turn, .. it only made the man angrier...& he shouted, "Do you know who I am?"..Then almost immediately, the attendant - in an act of sheer brilliance - picked up the microphone & announced: "Attention! There's a gentleman at the American Airline baggage check-in who doesn't know who he is.... If anyone can identify him, please come to the AA counter."...Don't you just love it when somebody who thinks they're more important or better than everyone else, gets put in their place?...It makes your day, doesn't it?

Jesus had to deal with that same "I'm so important" attitude in His own disciples, as we see in today's Gospel...He overhears them arguing about which of them is the greatest...& this was right after He had told them about how He was going to die,...& had told them, "If you want to be My disciples, you must deny yourself, pick up your cross & follow Me!"...That doesn't sound like it has anything to do with being GREAT, does it?... They obviously hadn't gotten the point yet, so – rather than chewing out His self-centered disciples (as you & I might do) - Jesus proceeds to teach them the true meaning of GREATNESS...He tells them,..."If anyone wishes to be first, he MUST be last of all & the servant of all."...In other words, "you wanna be GREAT, then you must be a servant of others."

Jesus makes it clear that greatness in the Kingdom of God is about serving...about giving, about others...The great 1's in the K of G R not those who make the most money or hav the most power,..not those with the best education,.. or those with the most talent,...The great one in the Kingdom of God are those who use the resources & talents & gifts God has given them – no matter how great or how small – to serve their brothers & sisters...Rev Martin Luther King said it this way: "Everybody can be great, because anybody can serve...You don't need a college degree... You don't have to make your subject & verb agree... You only need a heart full of grace & love."

Of course Jesus didn't just talk the talk... Later in Mark's Gospel, He tells His apostles: "I came not to be served, but to serve,...to give my life as a ransom for many.".. And that's exactly what He did. ...On the cross, He showed us how to be GREAT by serving all of humanity...But wait, by our world's standards, that bloody body hanging on the cross can't be the figure of a *great leader*...By the world's standards,.. that's a pathetic, misguided loser...Why would a great leader let that happen to Him? ...Why?... Because He loves every man, woman & child God has ever created;...because He cared enough to live & to die for them...Because without His loving & caring, the whole world would've literally gone to hell.

This is the loving & caring He wanted those first disciples to imitate, .& wants us to imitate, not necessarily by laying down our lives,...but by putting the needs of others before our own. That's how to be GREAT in God's eyes.

Now, just in case the disciples still didn't get it,... Jesus took a little child, held it up for them to see and said: "Whoever welcomes a child such as this welcomes me,...and welcomes the One who sent me.".....Now back in Jesus' time, the status of children was much different than it is today...Back then, children had no rights,...no legal standing...no voice...No power...They didn't matter.

So, what Jesus was saying was, “How you treat those who are on the lowest rung of the ladder, ...who have no power ...no influence...who can do nothing for you in return. ...How you treat them,...is how you treat Me & My Father.”.... Jesus WANTS His followers to be GREAT thru a life of serving others...especially – as He said later – serving those who are “the least of My brothers & sisters.”

My Friends, here's the thing:... Jesus came to change the rules of the game, to change how we play the game of life...He has been trying for over 2000 years to get us to play by His rules, but His message just hasn't gotten through ...Our world can't seem to let go of the notion that in the game of life – like in every other game – there's got to be winners & losers,...and only the smartest,..the shrewdest,..the most aggressive...the strongest,...the most physically able will make it to the winners circle...This way of playing the game of life is instilled into us right from the beginning of our lives....Look at the game of Musical Chairs we all learned to play in kindergarten.

Remember how it goes?....All the children dance around a circle of chairs while music plays. ..Then, when the music stops everyone rushes for a chair,.. But, there's a problem: *there's one less chair than there are kids*...So the smallest or slowest or weakest kid gets pushed out of the circle & has to watch the rest of them play...This keeps on as one by one children get kicked out of the circle – a kindergarten version of the TV show *Survivor* - until only the two biggest or strongest or most aggressive kids are left to battle it out for that last chair....When the music stops, the one who manages to muscle his way into that last chair raises his fist in triumph...He thinks he's so GREAT...The other kids probably think he's a jerk.

The sad thing is, that when we get out of kindergarten, the game of life is pretty much the same in almost all areas of life...There are the great ones – the winners – & everybody else – the losers.

But that's not the way Jesus wants the game to be played...In His version of Musical Chairs, when the children start to dance & the music stops,...the rule of the game is that EVERYONE STILL GETS A SEAT...So what does that mean?...Someone has to either share their seat with another child, or let them sit on their lap. .So what will happen?... The smallest kids, who would normally be the first ones pushed out of the circle, become the favorites,... because they won't take up much space in a shared seat or won't be much of a load in someone's lap...And the longer the game goes on, the more fun it gets, as more & more kids figure out how to keep everyone in the game with fewer & fewer chairs, until at the end,... the entire class – try to picture it - is sitting on one chair in one long lap upon lap upon lap...And Jesus cheers, because the children have learned the whole point of life when it's played by His rules: everyone wins, the smallest & weakest kids are protected,... & the bigger kids and the smarter kids & the stronger kids use their gifts to figure out how to keep everyone in the game, rather than trying to get everyone else out.

That's the game of Musical Chairs we should be teaching our children, ... & along with that we should be teaching them, ...by our own example,...how to be GREAT by serving others.

And so, in a few minutes as we come forward for Holy Communion, let our prayer be something like this: *Dear Jesus , I want to be GREAT...& I know you want me to be GREAT...So, as I receive your Body & Blood, & take you into myself,...please, Lord, make it help me become more like You, ...make it help me be a servant for others as You have been for me.” AMEN!*

