



35: MOTHER TERESA AIN'T FOOLIN'! (Luke 9:46-50)



Mother Teresa, who was awarded the 1979 Nobel Peace Prize, dedicated her life to the sick and hungry. Her simple message was “the poor must know that we love them”. Her followers regarded her as a saint, but Mother Teresa believed she was only doing God’s work. Amidst the poverty and slums of Calcutta, Mother Teresa’s efforts provided shelter to thousands of the sick and dying, and ensured that thousands of children were cared

for and given foster parents. More than two million sick, including nearly fifty thousand lepers, were treated by mobile dispensaries and special clinics. But for Mother Teresa, the Nobel Peace Prize was simply a gift to the poor.¹

Mother Teresa, like all of us, could have asserted how special she was. Instead, inspired by Jesus, she gave all of her time, effort, and resources to serving and loving the poorest of the poor, the youngest of the young, and the most forgotten in this world.

We live in a world where we all think we're better than someone else. Republicans feel superior to Democrats, Democrats feel superior to Republicans. Whites feel superior to Blacks. Blacks feel superior to Whites. The Rich feel superior to the Poor. The Poor feel superior to the Rich. The Young feel superior to the Old. The Old feel superior to the Young. The Educated feel superior to the Uneducated. The Uneducated feel superior to the Educated. The good looking feel superior to the not good looking. The not good looking feel superior to the good looking. The talented feel superior to the untalented. The untalented feel superior to the talented. It goes on and on.

All the above is human nature. The loving life of someone like Mother Teresa stands in stark contrast to the competition, selfishness, elitism, and utilitarianism of most of humanity. It challenges us.

And Jesus was the epicenter of leveling the heavenly playing field.

(Jesus), existing in the form of God, did not consider equality with God as something to be exploited. Instead He emptied himself by assuming the form of a servant, taking on the likeness of humanity. And when he had come as a man, He humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death— even to death on a cross. For this reason God highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow— in heaven and on earth and under the earth— and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Phil 2:6-11)

Jesus, the One and only Son of God, stood in the margins elevating those who were down low and humbling those who kept themselves propped up! Just look at the text of Luke 9:46-48!

46 An argument started among (the disciples) about who was the greatest of them. **47** But Jesus, knowing their inner thoughts, took a little child and had him stand next to him. **48** He told them, "Whoever welcomes this little child in my name welcomes me.

¹ <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/1979/teresa/documentary>

And whoever welcomes me welcomes him who sent me. For whoever is least among you—this one is great.” (Luke 9:46-48)

Let's give a little context. Two brief incidents closed Luke's report on the Galilean ministry. In the first, the disciples were haggling over who had the greatest position in the disciples' Hall of Fame.² Regarding each disciple's desire to be the greatest, we often like to make distinctions, such as between the lovely and the unlovely, between gifted and the problem people, between important people and the rest of humanity. It's a travesty on the image of God in every person to think this way.³

We all have a little spirit of competition in us, don't we? Some of us think we're pretty important for some reason or another. Some of us struggle with a superiority complex. We might think we're smarter than other people. We might think we're more moral than other people. We might think we're better looking than other people. We might think we're in better shape than other people. We might think we're more competent than other people. We might think we're more talented than other people. These all lead to pride and a judgemental attitude.

And others of us think we're unimportant for some reason or another. Some of us struggle with an inferiority complex. We might think we're less intelligent than other people. We might think we're less moral than other people. We might think we're not as good looking as other people. We might think we're in worse shape than other people. We might think we're less competent than other people. We might think we're less talented than other people. These all lead to envy and apathy.

And some of us have a mixture of superiority and inferiority complexes. We're all very complex in the complexity of our complexes, aren't we? 😊

But what was happening with the disciples arguing over who was the greatest of them? Inwardly, we can't be sure. But outwardly, it seems they felt pretty important, and wanted to assert themselves to one another, which caused conflict.

And we all are much like the disciples. Maybe this is why James, the brother of Jesus, wrote;

1 *What is the source of wars and fights among you? Don't they come from your passions that wage war within you? 2 You desire and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and wage war. You do not have because you do not ask. 3 You ask and don't receive because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may*

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spend it on your pleasures. 4 You adulterous people! Don't you know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? So whoever wants to be the friend of the world becomes the enemy of God. 5 Or do you think it's without reason that the Scripture says: The spirit he made to dwell in us envies intensely? 6 But he gives greater grace. Therefore he says:

*God resists the proud
but gives grace to the humble.*

7 Therefore, submit to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. 8 Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. 9 Be miserable and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. 10 Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you. 11 Don't criticize one another, brothers and sisters. Anyone who defames or judges a fellow believer defames and judges the law. If you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. 12 There is one lawgiver and judge who is able to save and to destroy. But who are you to judge your neighbor? (James 4:1-12)

If you're saying to yourself right now, "it's a good thing I don't do those things!" Think again! You do. We all do.

I'll go for the jugular and say that it all comes from an imbalance of grace and truth. Eph. 4:15 tells us; Speaking the truth in love, let us grow in every way into him who is the head—Christ. But all of us fall into one of two categories. We either speak the truth with a lack of love, or we try to love without being truthful. Knute Larson once said, "Truth without Grace destroys, Grace without Truth deceives." That sums it up! All of us are either prideful about our truthfulness, or prideful about our graciousness.

One can know they're prideful about their truthfulness when they quite literally get off on seeing people squirm from having to face the truth, whether the "truth" they're stating is true or not! Folks like this love conflict. They love to say hard things. They get an adrenaline rush from offending people. They don't feel the necessity to add grace, compassion and mercy to their words. They figure that people better just deal with whatever they've got to say.

One can know they're prideful about their graciousness when they can't stand having to tell someone something that is true, even when it will help them. Folks like this hate conflict. They refuse to say hard things. They get an anxiety attack from offending people. They don't feel the necessity to be honest, as long as everyone seems to like them and there appears to be a false sense of harmony around them. They figure that as long as they're being nice to everyone, everything will be fine.

Being prideful about being truthful is usually obvious. People that have this issue tend to be loud enough for most people to hear.

But being prideful about being gracious is much less obvious, yet equally as destructive. People that have this issue come off as gentle and lovely to most, but people close to them in their orbit live in a perpetual state of frustration, having to deal with their manipulative game of “keeping the peace at all costs”.

I’m sure that some of the disciples of Jesus thought they were more loving than the others. I’m sure that others of the disciples thought they were more truthful, passionate, and stronger leaders. I don’t doubt that a crew which included polar opposites like Matthew the tax collector and Simon the Zealot had plenty of personality differences, and clashed in their strengths and weaknesses!

But what gives more value to every human life than to see in every person a merit they possess inherently because they have been made by the God of the universe? Jesus detested the kind of competition and merit rating to which the disciples seemed committed.⁴

So cutting through the garbage as usual, Jesus highlighted the value of a child, and thereby Jesus raised everyone’s stature. If the lowly were to be welcomed in Jesus’ name, all were to be welcomed. We are all important to our Lord. If He died for our sin, then He has elevated the potential stature of every person who serves him, since forgiveness and full restoration are grounded in faith in him. To welcome a child is to welcome Jesus, which in turn is to welcome the God who sent them both. When the least is the greatest, all are great and the search for greatness becomes unnecessary.⁵

And because of Jesus, we’ll say it again and again. Streetlight Community Church isn’t just a Church in Kenmore that happens to be doing a teaching series called “God in the Margins”. We really believe that God works in the Margins! The violent are welcome here just as much as the peaceful are welcomed here. The abused are welcomed here just as much as the healthfully loved are welcome here. The poor are welcomed here just as much as the rich are welcomed here. The exploited are welcomed here just as much as the exploiters are welcome here (to the extent that they’re willing to stop exploiting people!) The marginalized are welcomed here just as much as the mainstreamers are welcome here. Those hurt by the Church are welcomed here just as much as those who love the Church are welcome here. The misfits are welcomed here just as much as the “cool kids” are welcomed here. The old and the young are welcomed here. Those of African, Asian, Australian, European, North American, and

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South American descent are welcomed here. Believe me we will always pursue being multi-ethnic because so many different people of different backgrounds are in Kenmore and the greater Akron area, and we want to make space for them all! Those with no religious background are welcomed here. Those with intense religious backgrounds are welcomed here. Republicans are welcomed here. Democrats are welcomed here. Those with zero manners are welcomed here, and the polite and mature are welcomed here. We are inviting **everyone** into a **lifelong** relationship with Jesus. The catch is, we'll keep calling you to lifelong discipleship, growth in Christ, and maturity in Christ! Those who don't want that might peace out. Those who want it can move towards it at whatever pace the Lord is leading them.

Back to the text, as we see how Jesus leveled the playing field of His disciples perceived status;

49 John responded, "Master, we saw someone driving out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him because he does not follow us." 50 "Don't stop him," Jesus told him, "because whoever is not against you is for you." (Luke 9:49-50)

"Ministry" isn't a copyrighted monopoly. The disciples saw someone casting out demons in Jesus' name. Since this person wasn't one of the "elite", they tried to stop him. Jesus told the disciples that they were wrong. Whoever was not against them was on their side.

"Ministry" should not be limited to a select few. Unlike the Marines, who want "a few good men", Jesus wants all to serve and encourages all to do so. His remark that "whoever is not against you is for you" reflects proverbial wisdom in Jewish culture, such as the attitude of Moses toward Eldad and Medad (Num. 11:26 - 30). Moses was glad others were being led by the Lord to do his work. Ministry should not be limited to one group, one denomination, or one theological tradition. All who serve the Lord faithfully deserve our support.⁶

Now some of you are saying right now, "Amen! I agree! As long as someone is evangelical, republican, cessationist, and complementarian they definitely deserve my support!" Uh uh uh!!! No no no. You're missing the point.

Others of you are saying, "Amen, I agree! As long as someone is an anti-evangelical democrat and an egalitarian they definitely deserve my support!" Uh uh uh!!! No no no. You're missing the point.

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Some of you are saying, “As long as they’re charismatic, speak in tongues, and have visions from the Lord they deserve my support!” Uh uh uh!!! No no no. ***You’re missing the point!!!!***

Are you hearing me yet?

I hear you, when someone denies [basic tenets of Christian faith](#), we certainly don’t need to be partnering with them for the Kingdom. We can be friends and be kind to one another. We can even partner for civic activities to make our cities, towns and neighborhoods better, but we don’t need to lend our spiritual support and fellowship to unbiblical and Holy Spirit devoid ministries.

But those who believe in the basic tenets of the Christian faith are of a much larger variety than we can get our narrow American, Individualistic minds around! I saw this in vivid color this past week. I went to a prayer and worship conference in Fort Wayne, Indiana put on by my good friends at [Grace Gathering Church](#). There were protestants, catholics, cessationists, charismatics, complementarians, and egalitarians all gathered together there, all different ages, socio-economic statuses, and racial backgrounds. We were there to worship Jesus, put aside our secondary differences, pray together, and grow together as one body. You’d be amazed at what people out there are doing for Christ! There was a worship group there called “Shema Culture” that is committed to revitalizing the Catholic Church in the power of the Word and the Holy Spirit! There was a moment where a Catholic Nun, Catholic Priest, Black Protestant Pastor, and White Protestant Pastor were up front, leading everyone in prayer and encouragement. What a beautiful thing when God’s people lean into what they have in common, while also acknowledging their differences!

Our own culture loves to compete and loves to restrict access to ministry. Jesus makes it clear that such an emphasis distorts the call of God. All are important, and ministry is open to all who embrace Christ. We must see people as God sees them and respond to them accordingly.⁷

A disease that plagues ministry is the belief that we are indispensable, that only **we** can perform it. But ministry is not a franchise with an exclusive license. The DNA of one church group is not somehow superior to others. Some churches are healthier and more faithful to Christ than others, but in the eyes of Christ, those who are faithfully disciples in every expression of biblical Christianity are what matters. The disciples needed to learn that in order to blanket the world, many laborers were needed, and Jesus enlisted many into the ranks of ministry.

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Efforts to elevate some ministries over others or some areas of service as more important than others denies the variety that is the beauty of the body of Christ. When Paul discusses this topic in 1 Corinthians 12, he refers to giving greater honor to the less honorable parts, so that all may sense the acceptance of their role in the body (1 Cor. 12:21 - 26). Jesus wants his disciples to appreciate the right others have to minister. No one performs in the church as a lone ranger. The one who is not against us is for us; and we need all the allies we can use.⁸

I think it's time for the Body of Christ in Akron to stop being driven by the things that the devil tempted Jesus with- Popularity, Power, and Pennies! It's time to stop the stupid competition. It's time to stop seeking our own platforms and how to magnify them. It's time to stop mowing each other down so we can have control and dominance over one another. It's time to stop just looking out for our own pocketbooks and bank accounts, and how our families can benefit from what we're doing. It's time to stop amassing wealth and opulence in the Name of Jesus.

In the power of the Spirit we can truly invite Jesus to have His way, and invite Him to unite us in the essential elements of the gospel and the Word. We can put secondary things aside. We can stop plotting against one another and quarreling with each other and instead pray together. We can listen to one another. We can value one another. We can celebrate one another. We can encourage each other and seek the good of one another. We can learn to truly love Akron together too. We live in a city that is plagued by violence, lust, addiction, poverty, despair, murder, rape, death, homelessness, hunger, trauma, fear, and blight. It's time for the silos of the Church to truly be destroyed, and in the rubble, for us to find each other again, and bring about a new era of beautiful unity we had in the Churches and Nonprofits of this city akin to what we've had in the past! Only God can bring it about!

May we truly know what it means to invite Christ into us in the way that Oswald Chambers described:

Beware of living according to your natural affections in your spiritual life. Everyone has natural affections— some people we like and others we don't like. Yet we must never let those likes and dislikes rule our Christian life. "If we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another" (1 John 1:7), even those toward whom we have no affection.

May we not live according to our affections, but according to His affection!

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What political party, people group, age group, or cultural group do you struggle with feeling superior to? How does God want you to treat them?
2. Do you struggle with a superiority complex or an inferiority complex? What does God have to say to you about this?
3. What should followers of Christ be united on? What should we be willing to divide over? Do we sometimes unite on things we shouldn't, and divide over things we shouldn't?