

Mark 8:31-38
February 25, '18
Lent 2

“WHEN LOSING IS WINNING”

AT SOME POINT THIS WEEK, I COULDN'T REMEMBER IF I HAD TITLED THIS MESSAGE “*WHEN LOSING IS WINNING*” OR “*WHEN WINNING IS LOSING*.”

I SUPPOSE, IN THE END, THE POINT IS REALLY THE SAME BUT I THINK THE LESSON JESUS IS TEACHING IN THIS PASSAGE CERTAINLY LENDS ITSELF MORE TO THE FORMER – “*WHEN LOSING IS WINNING*.”

I THINK THE REASON I WAS CONFUSED ABOUT IT IS BECAUSE I WAS THINKING OF AN EXPERIENCE I ONCE HAD THAT – IN MY LIFE – PERFECTLY EXEMPLIFIED THE LATTER – “*WHEN WINNING IS LOSING*.”

IT WAS A SPORTING EVENT – AS YOU MAY HAVE GUESSED, A HOCKEY GAME.

I WAS A GOALIE & THIS WAS ONE OF THE MOST MEMORABLE MOMENTS OF MY HOCKEY-PLAYING DAYS.

IT IS INDELIBLY IMBEDDED IN MY MIND.

THERE WAS A CLOSE PLAY AT THE NET ON MY RIGHT SIDE.

I WAS DOWN ON THE ICE & SOMEONE TOOK A SHOT.

I INITIALLY STOPPED IT BUT THEN THE PUCK TRICKLED BEHIND ME & JUST OVER THE GOAL LINE.

INSTINCTIVELY, I REACHED BACK AND PULLED IT OUT OF THE NET & COVERED IT.

THE REFEREE BLEW HIS WHISTLE & SIGNALLED “NO GOAL” & POINTED TO THE FACE-OFF CIRCLE NEXT TO ME FOR THE DROP OF THE PUCK.

AS I LOOKED UP, I SAW THE PLAYER WHO HAD TAKEN THE SHOT.

I'M QUITE CERTAIN THERE WERE ONLY TWO PEOPLE IN THE ENTIRE ARENA WHO KNEW THAT PUCK HAD CROSSED THE LINE.

I WAS ONE & HE WAS THE OTHER.

WHAT MAKES THAT MOMENT SO MEMORABLE FOR ME IS THE LOOK I SAW ON THAT GUY'S FACE.

IT WASN'T FRUSTRATION & IT WASN'T ANGER, BUT IT WAS A LOOK THAT I KNEW I'D NEVER FORGET – AND I HAVEN'T.

IT WAS A “WHEN WINNING IS LOSING” MOMENT FOR ME.

TODAY, THOUGH, WE'RE TALKING ABOUT THE REVERSE – “WHEN LOSING IS WINNING.”

I THINK THIS IDEA REALLY STRIKES AT THE VERY HEART OF THE GOSPEL MESSAGE.

THIS PASSAGE IN MARK IS FOUND AT THE VERY CENTER OF THE BOOK – RIGHT AT THE END OF THE 8TH OF MARK'S 16 CHAPTERS.

JUST PRIOR TO THE VERSES WE'VE READ, JESUS & THE DISCIPLES WERE AT A PLACE CALLED CAESAREA PHILIPPI – THE MOST NORTHERN PLACE HE WOULD EVER TRAVEL.

IT WAS HERE THAT JESUS ASKED THE DISCIPLES WHAT THEY WERE HEARING FROM OTHERS.

“WHO DO PEOPLE SAY THAT I AM?”

THE DISCIPLES OFFER A VARIETY OF ANSWERS BUT THEN HE ASKS THEM ANOTHER, FAR MORE IMPORTANT & FAR MORE PERSONAL, QUESTION: “*BUT WHO DO YOU SAY THAT I AM?*”

OF COURSE, IT'S PETER – IMPETUOUS PETER – WHO PROCLAIMS “*YOU ARE THE CHRIST.*”

THIS IS AN ABSOLUTELY REMARKABLE (EXCUSE THE PUN) STATEMENT IN “MARK’S” GOSPEL.

ONE OF THE REASONS IT’S REMARKABLE IS BECAUSE THIS IS THE FIRST TIME THAT WORD – “CHRIST” – HAS BEEN SEEN IN MARK SINCE THE VERY FIRST VERSE OF THE ENTIRE BOOK – “*THE BEGINNING OF THE GOOD NEWS OF JESUS CHRIST, THE SON OF GOD.*”

THERE ARE SEVERAL FASCINATING ASPECTS TO THIS.

THE FIRST VERSE OF WHAT WE’VE READ THIS MORNING SAYS, “*THEN HE BEGAN TO TEACH THEM....*”

HE “BEGAN” TO TEACH THEM!?

WE’RE IN THE 8TH CHAPTER!

WE’RE HALFWAY THROUGH THE ENTIRE BOOK & MARK SAYS, “HE *BEGAN TO TEACH THEM!?*”

WHAT IN THE WORLD HAS HE BEEN DOING FOR THE FIRST SEVEN & A HALF CHAPTERS IF NOT TEACHING THEM!?

LOOK AT THE REST OF THAT VERSE – “*HE BEGAN TO TEACH THEM THAT THE SON OF MAN MUST UNDERGO GREAT SUFFERING, AND BE REJECTED BY THE ELDERS, THE CHIEF PRIESTS, AND THE SCRIBES, AND BE KILLED, AND AFTER THREE DAYS RISE AGAIN.*”

OH, HE’S BEEN TEACHING – AND HE’S BEEN HEALING – AND HE’S BEEN DRIVING OUT DEMONS.

BUT UNTIL NOW, HE HASN’T BEEN SAYING ANYTHING LIKE THIS.

AND AFTER PETER SHOWS THAT IT’S TOO MUCH FOR HIM TO HANDLE, JESUS GOES EVEN FURTHER.

HE UTTERS WORDS THAT STAND AT THE VERY HEART OF THE GOSPEL – WORDS THAT OFFER A WAY OF LIFE THAT IS IN COMPLETE CONTRADICTION TO THE WAY OF THE WORLD.

JESUS SAYS, “IF ANY WANT TO BECOME MY FOLLOWERS, LET THEM DENY THEMSELVES AND TAKE UP THEIR CROSS & FOLLOW ME. FOR THOSE WHO WANT TO SAVE THEIR LIFE WILL LOSE IT, AND THOSE WHO LOSE THEIR LIFE FOR MY SAKE, AND FOR THE SAKE OF THE GOSPEL, WILL SAVE IT. FOR WHAT WILL IT PROFIT THEM TO GAIN THE WHOLE WORLD AND FORFEIT THEIR LIFE?”

IN ESSENCE, JESUS IS SAYING, “IF YOU WANT TO FOLLOW ME - IF YOU WANT WHAT I HAVE TO OFFER – YOU’RE GOING TO HAVE TO DO THINGS DIFFERENTLY.

**YOU’RE GOING TO HAVE TO LOOK AT THE WORLD DIFFERENTLY.
YOU’RE GOING TO HAVE TO LOOK AT OTHER PEOPLE
DIFFERENTLY.**

**YOU’RE GOING TO HAVE TO LOOK AT POWER & SUCCESS
DIFFERENTLY.**

**BASICALLY, YOU’RE GOING TO HAVE TO TURN YOUR WHOLE
WORLD UPSIDE DOWN.**

**IN MY WORLD, THE FIRST ARE LAST AND THE LAST FIRST.
THE RICH ARE POOR AND THE POOR ARE RICH.
THE STRONG ARE WEAK AND THE WEAK ARE STRONG.
IN MY WORLD, LOSING IS WINNING.”**

**WE SO OFTEN ASSOCIATE WINNING & LOSING WITH ATHLETIC
COMPETITION.**

**OVER THE PAST TWO WEEKS, WE’VE SEEN A FEW WINNERS & A
LOT OF LOSERS IN THE VARIOUS OLYMPIC SPORTS.**

**EVEN WITH THAT STATEMENT, THOUGH, THE REALITY IS SO
DIFFERENT.**

ANYONE WHO WAS THERE & COMPETING HAD ALREADY ACCOMPLISHED SOMETHING THAT VERY FEW PEOPLE IN THE WORLD WILL EVER ACCOMPLISH.

AND YET, WE STILL PUT THE LOSER TAG ON SOMEONE WHO DOESN'T WIN – NOT JUST A *MEDAL* – BUT A *GOLD* MEDAL.

“ISN'T IT A SHAME THAT SO-AND-SO HAD TO SETTLE FOR A SILVER?”

THINK THAT THROUGH – DO YOU REALLY MEAN TO SAY, “I THINK IT'S SO UNFORTUNATE THAT THAT PERSON IS THE SECOND-BEST PERSON IN THE ENTIRE WORLD AT THEIR CHOSEN SPORT?”

EVEN IN SPORTS, THOUGH, THERE'S AN ENTIRELY DIFFERENT WAY OF LOOKING AT THIS WHOLE IDEA OF “WHEN LOSING IS WINNING.”

SOME OF YOU MAY HAVE HEARD ABOUT A TENNIS MATCH TWO YEARS AGO BETWEEN AUSTRALIAN LLEYTON HEWITT AND AMERICAN JACK SOCK.

IT WAS A TIGHT MATCH & HEWITT HIT A SERVE THAT WAS RULED OUT BY THE LINE UMPIRE.

SOCK CALLED OVER TO HEWITT, SAYING, *“THAT WAS IN IF YOU WANT TO CHALLENGE IT.”*

HEWITT LOOKED AT HIM IN STUNNED DISBELIEF.

THE CHAIR UMPIRE LAUGHED & SO DID THE CROWD.

HEWITT DIDN'T KNOW WHAT TO DO WITH SOMETHING LIKE THAT BUT HE DECIDED TO BELIEVE HIS OPPONENT WAS – FOR SOME REASON – BEING HONEST.

HE CHALLENGED THE CALL AND, SURE ENOUGH, SOCK WAS RIGHT.

THE CALL WAS OVERTURNED & THE CROWD EXPLODED IN UPROARIOUS APPLAUSE – NOT BECAUSE HEWITT WON THE POINT, BUT BECAUSE OF WHAT JACK SOCK HAD JUST DONE.

HEWITT WENT ON TO WIN THE MATCH – BUT JACK SOCK CERTAINLY DIDN'T LOSE THAT DAY.

IN THE WORLD OF SPORTS, THAT'S AN EXAMPLE OF “*WHEN LOSING IS WINNING.*”

JACK SOCK WON THE RESPECT & ADMIRATION OF EVERYONE WHO WITNESSED SUCH AN INCREDIBLE DISPLAY OF SPORTSMANSHIP.

WHAT JESUS IS SAYING IN THIS PASSAGE IS THAT WE HAVE TO RE-ORIENT OUR LIVES & OUR PRIORITIES IF WE TRULY WISH TO BE HIS FOLLOWERS.

THAT'S NOT EASY.

IT'S NOT EASY BECAUSE EVERY DAY – OVER & OVER AGAIN – WE'RE TOLD THAT IT'S THE RICH & THE STRONG & THE POWERFUL IN THIS WORLD WHO MATTER MOST.

WE'RE SEDUCED BY THOSE WHO LIKE TO MOCK & RIDICULE ANYONE WHO DOESN'T – BY THEIR ESTIMATION – “MEASURE UP” – THOSE WHO *AREN'T* RICH OR STRONG OR POWERFUL.

DON'T GET ME WRONG – THERE'S NOTHING INHERENTLY BAD ABOUT BEING ANY OF THOSE THINGS – RICH OR STRONG OR POWERFUL.

BUT I THINK IT SIMPLY HIGHLIGHTS THE DIFFICULTY & THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN THE STANDARDS OF THIS WORLD AND THE STANDARDS TO WHICH GOD CALLS US.

WHEN JESUS SAYS, “TAKE UP YOUR CROSS & FOLLOW ME,” WE OFTEN MISUNDERSTAND WHAT HE MEANS BY THAT.

WE EVEN SAY THINGS LIKE – “THAT’S MY CROSS TO BEAR” AND WHAT WE MEAN BY THAT IS SOME FORM OF SUFFERING HAS BEEN IMPOSED ON US – SOMETHING WE HAVE TO ENDURE EVEN THOUGH WE DON’T WANT TO.

SUFFERING ON THE CROSS WASN’T SOMETHING IMPOSED ON CHRIST – HE WILLINGLY & INTENTIONALLY TOOK IT UPON HIMSELF BECAUSE IT MEANT OUR REDEMPTION.

HE REFUSED TO THINK OF HIMSELF, BUT THOUGHT ONLY OF OTHERS.

TO TAKE UP OUR CROSS AND FOLLOW JESUS MEANS WE FOLLOW HIM IN REFUSING TO THINK ONLY OF OURSELVES.

ISN’T THAT EXACTLY WHAT JESUS SAYS HERE?

“IF YOU REALLY WANT TO BECOME MY FOLLOWER, DENY YOURSELF, TAKE UP YOUR CROSS & FOLLOW ME.”

THAT’S WHY JOHN CALVIN SAYS THAT SELF-DENIAL CONSTITUTES THE ESSENCE OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE.

THIS ISN’T EASY TO UNDERSTAND.

IT ISN’T EASY TO ACCEPT.

IT GOES DIRECTLY AGAINST EVERYTHING THE WORLD TEACHES US.

BUT, YOU SEE, HERE’S WHAT’S SO FASCINATING ABOUT THIS.

JESUS ISN’T ASKING US TO DO SOMETHING WE DON’T WANT TO DO.

WHAT HE’S ASKING IS FOR US TO WANT TO DO SOMETHING DIFFERENT.

HE’S SAYING THAT IF WE LOOK AT HIM – IF WE FIND SOMETHING DESIRABLE IN HIM – DESIRABLE ENOUGH THAT IT BECOMES THE MAIN FOCUS OF OUR LIFE – WE WILL RE-ORIENT OUR

ATTITUDES & OUR VALUES SO THAT OUR GREATEST JOY IS FOUND IN SERVING OTHERS, JUST AS HE DID.

THE GREAT QUAKER PHILOSOPHER & THEOLOGIAN, ELTON TRUEBLOOD, EXPLAINED THIS COMPLICATING NATURE OF THE GOSPEL BY SAYING, “*IN MANY WAYS, THE GOSPEL, INSTEAD OF TAKING AWAY PEOPLE’S BURDENS, ACTUALLY ADDS TO THEM.*”

TO ILLUSTRATE HIS POINT, HE TELLS THE STORY OF JOHN WOOLMAN, A SUCCESSFUL QUAKER MERCHANT IN THE 18TH CENTURY.

WOOLMAN LIVED A VERY COMFORTABLE LIFE UNTIL THE WORDS OF CHRIST CONVICTED HIM OF THE OFFENSE OF OWNING SLAVES.

ONCE THAT HAPPENED, WOOLMAN GAVE UP HIS PROSPEROUS BUSINESS.

HE USED HIS MONEY & ALL HIS ENERGY TO TRY TO FREE SLAVES.

IN REFLECTING ON WHAT JOHN WOOLMAN DID, TRUEBLOOD SAYS, “*OCCASIONALLY WE TALK OF OUR CHRISTIANITY AS SOMETHING THAT SOLVES PROBLEMS, AND THERE IS A SENSE IN WHICH IT DOES.*

***LONG BEFORE IT DOES, THOUGH, IT INCREASES BOTH THE NUMBER & THE INTENSITY OF OUR PROBLEMS.*”**

JESUS ISN’T ASKING US TO DO SOMETHING WE DON’T WANT TO DO.

WHAT HE’S ASKING IS FOR US TO WANT TO DO SOMETHING DIFFERENT.

I’M SURE MANY OF YOU ARE FAMILIAR WITH C.S. LEWIS’S BOOK MERE CHRISTIANITY – PERHAPS THE MOST INFLUENTIAL CHRISTIAN BOOK OF THE 20TH CENTURY.

OFTEN, WE CAN GET THE ESSENCE OF A BOOK BY READING ITS FINAL WORDS.

I THINK THAT'S TRUE WITH MERE CHRISTIANITY.

LEWIS'S FINAL WORDS, IN HIS FINAL PARAGRAPH, IN HIS FINAL CHAPTER ARE THESE: *"THE PRINCIPLE RUNS THROUGH ALL LIFE FROM TOP TO BOTTOM.*

GIVE UP YOURSELF, AND YOU WILL FIND YOUR REAL SELF.

LOSE YOUR LIFE AND YOU WILL SAVE IT.

SUBMIT TO DEATH, DEATH OF YOUR AMBITIONS AND FAVOURITE WISHES EVERY DAY AND DEATH OF YOUR WHOLE BODY IN THE END.

SUBMIT WITH EVERY FIBRE OF YOUR BEING, AND YOU WILL FIND ETERNAL LIFE.

KEEP BACK NOTHING.

NOTHING THAT YOU HAVE NOT GIVEN AWAY WILL EVER BE REALLY YOURS.

NOTHING IN YOU THAT HAS NOT DIED WILL EVER BE RAISED FROM THE DEAD.

LOOK FOR YOURSELF, AND YOU WILL FIND IN THE LONG RUN ONLY HATRED, LONELINESS, DESPAIR, RAGE, RUIN, AND DECAY.

BUT LOOK FOR CHRIST AND YOU WILL FIND HIM, AND WITH HIM EVERYTHING ELSE THROWN IN."

IN THAT "WINNING IS LOSING" HOCKEY EXPERIENCE OF MINE THAT I SHARED AT THE BEGINNING, I MENTIONED THE LOOK ON THAT PLAYER'S FACE THAT I'LL NEVER FORGET.

THAT PLAYER'S NAME WAS GARY.

I KNOW HIS NAME BECAUSE HE WAS A FRIEND – A CLOSE FRIEND.

GARY WENT ON TO ATTEND YALE UNIVERSITY WHERE HE PLAYED – NOT HOCKEY – BUT BASEBALL.

GARY IS STILL A FRIEND OF MINE.

I SAID THE LOOK ON GARY’S FACE WASN’T ANGER.

IT WASN’T FRUSTRATION.

NO, THE LOOK I SAW ON GARY’S FACE – THAT LOOK THAT HAS ALWAYS BEEN IMBEDDED IN MY MIND – WAS A LOOK OF DISAPPOINTMENT.

BUT IT WASN’T DISAPPOINTMENT THAT HE WASN’T GOING TO BE AWARDED A GOAL THAT HE DESERVED.

NO, GARY’S DISAPPOINTMENT WAS IN ME.

HE KNEW ME & HE THOUGHT I WAS DIFFERENT.

HE THOUGHT MY UNDERSTANDING OF WINNING & LOSING WAS A DIFFERENT UNDERSTANDING FROM THAT OF THE WORLD.

HOW I WISH I HAD JUMPED UP WHEN THE REFEREE HAD SIGNALLED “NO GOAL” AND SAID, “*YES IT WAS. IT CROSSED THE LINE & I PULLED IT OUT.*”

THE WONDERFUL THING IS THAT I KNOW, THROUGH GOD’S GRACE & MERCY, I HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY EVERY DAY TO DO JUST THAT – TO STAND UP & SPEAK OUT ON BEHALF OF OTHERS.

AND SO DO YOU.

WE ALL HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO BE DIFFERENT FROM THE REST OF THE WORLD BECAUSE THAT’S WHAT GOD CALLS US TO BE.

REMEMBER – JESUS ISN’T ASKING US TO DO SOMETHING WE DON’T WANT TO DO.

WHAT HE’S ASKING IS FOR US TO WANT TO DO SOMETHING DIFFERENT.

***“LOOK FOR CHRIST AND YOU WILL FIND HIM, AND WITH HIM
EVERYTHING ELSE THROWN IN.” AMEN.***

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