

February 28, 2021 ~ 2nd Sunday in Lent ~ The Happy Loser

Through the written word and through the spoken word may we know your living word, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

My family know that I get competitive when I play games with them. I play to win as best as I can when I play scrabble in the evening at the cottage or boggle or any other game. Watch out! Here I come in full competitive spirit.

I never could win at sports as I was never very good but I could be the winner in school and during games. There are even slogans, *"We play to win."* A famous football coach, Vince Lombardi said this; *"Winning isn't everything. It's the only thing."* And the saying, *"It doesn't matter whether you win or lose but how you play the game."* We teach this to our children but does the world really believe that?

Every child on a hockey team or baseball team or soccer team knows how good it feels to win. A WINNER. Even the name sounds good. We put trophies in our home of times we've won, at sports, at bridge, at bowling or curling.

Let's compare this with the word LOSER. It doesn't even sound very good, does it? No one wants to be a loser. Are we hard wired to want to win? Is it society that instils this desire inside of us, starting when we are very young? Winning team vs. losing team. Which team do you want to be on?

That is why our journey of discipleship is in some ways opposite to how we are programmed to react in the world. Christianity turns many of our ideas on their heads. Our perspective about winning and losing changes as we grow in discipleship and as we grow in grace.

What does Jesus teach us on this 2nd Sunday in Lent? Jesus taught his followers that he must suffer and be killed before he would rise in glory. Jesus taught the crowd that *"if any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me."* That is why we are practicing spiritual disciplines during Lent. To grow in spiritual strength, to follow the words of Jesus and to willingly pick up the cross and follow our Saviour.

Jesus goes on to teach that you and I must become a LOSER. Here are his instructions from Mark's gospel (chapter 8:35)

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.

Eugene Peterson has written a simple translation of the Bible, called the Message. Here is his translation of this passage (Mark 8:34-35) from the Message:

Calling the crowd to join his disciples, he said, "Anyone who intends to come with me has to let me lead. You're not in the driver's seat; I am. Don't run from suffering; embrace it. Follow me and I'll show you how. Self-help is no help at all. Self-sacrifice is the way, my way, to saving yourself, your true self. What could you ever trade your soul for?"

We are called to be a LOSER of the part of ourselves that the world often embraces. The dark parts of using our egos, focusing on gimme, getting ahead at all costs. When we embrace God's will and we learn to be humble and obedient we are strengthened by God's grace. We then save ourselves, the Christ-centred part of ourselves that leads in grace and in compassion and makes the world a better place. We become part of the covenant of God's promises to us.

In our passage last week from Genesis 9, God made a covenant with Noah and with all living creatures. This week we read about the covenant between God and Abraham. God will make of Abraham a great nation, and will bless him and all of his descendants. This covenant will be everlasting and will move outward to bless "all the families of the earth." (Genesis 12:3).

This is part of the wonderful story of God. God chooses a small tribe, a group of wanderers, to share the blessing of the covenant and then that promise moves out into a blessing for the whole world, all the families of the earth. A covenant of blessing that you and I can be part of.

That is the wonder of our faith. When we reflect upon our faith, we embrace God's world and we desire to become a LOSER, to lose our life, to

lose our thoughts that the world is all about us, and to share in the wonder of our salvation and of eternal life with God.

This reality that we must become a LOSER is not appealing to the world, is it? Imagine a job description on Kijiji: *Calling all losers!* It would not be very effective to put this phrase on a banner outside of the church. *Do you want to lose? We can help you!!*

In God's world, we know the first will be last and the last will be first. When we lose our life, we will gain the promise of eternal life, of life lived deeply and well, of a life filled with glory to glory, and with the true JOY that comes from being a disciple of Jesus.

Do I want to be a LOSER for Christ? You bet I do. Amen.