

## Losing It Mark 8:31-38

<sup>31</sup>Then *Jesus* 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. <sup>32</sup>He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. <sup>33</sup>But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."

<sup>34</sup>He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. <sup>35</sup>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. <sup>36</sup>For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? <sup>37</sup>Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? <sup>38</sup>Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

Leader: This is the Word of the Lord

**People: Thanks be to God.**

We hate to lose. Recently the nastiest thing to call someone is a "loser." It's so bad that if you come in second among a field of a hundred you are as much a loser as the guy who came in 99<sup>th</sup>. I say 99 out of hundred because the last guy may actually be the first guy in the next race. Why didn't I think of that back in gym class? I'm not a loser, I just started a day early. Competition comes naturally to us children of survivors. Over the centuries only the strong survived to pass on their genes, or wait a minute. What about those who were wise enough to live to fight another day? What of those who chose cooperation over duels to the death? It isn't winning that our universe favors, but fit to the situation.

I heard a profound statement a while ago. If the early bird gets the worm what does the early worm get? If life is all about winning we are most to be pitied because Christianity is all about losing. We are founded by a convicted criminal who suffered the death penalty. We are nurtured by the writings of people who suffered martyrdom. One of the attractions of Islam is that Mohammed wasn't above picking up a sword and slaying some bad guys. Can we sustain this paradox at the heart of our faith? Nothing about us predicts that we would be good at life, prosperous, and successful in our mission. In his time people followed Jesus as our Scottish forebears followed William Wallace. At least he had moments of glory until he went down to ignominious defeat.

We have all heard people claim that America is a Christian Country, which overlooks the fact that Canada and Mexico are part of America as well as all those folks down to Tierra del Fuego – I love to say that. What would a Christian Country look like? Nothing in our world history since Jesus can really claim to be the Kingdom of God. Some may be closer approximations than others. The characteristics of a *Christian Country*, are <sup>see Galatians 5</sup> “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.” There have been attempts among us to live as Christian nations. Monastic societies, Amish, Quakers, other peace churches have in some ways withdrawn from their larger nations to create nations within.

When people take charge of nations in the name of Jesus Christ things seem to go pear shaped. The Puritan New England, our city on the hill, gave us a lot of good values but they also gave us witch trials and Connecticut. Not that I have anything against Connecticut except I'd rather drive though Chicago than Hartford, but we tend to rush to shunning when faced with different interpretations of God's will. The shunned person can then be treated cruelly even killed when the power of government stands behind the supposedly faithful.

So Jesus program of losing creates a lot of problems for us. Yet it releases us from defending things of no ultimate value and commits us to look for the precious metal that does not wear away or tarnish. Jesus set out on the path that went another way. People are threatened by that way. He invited us to follow knowing that our value will not be recognized. As the church continues on this path we are confronted not so much by aggression as apathy. What good are we? The last presbytery meeting explored the reasons young people might not be coming to church. One idea is that it's boring. Well in my experience church has always been boring. Thank God for times to just be, to think, to break through and embrace the love that does not seek to entertain.

We are called to be revolutionary in ways that no revolution has embraced. Ours is not a plan to seize control, but to refrain from power and coercion. If the Christian Church were actually to dry up and disappear sometime in the future I would hope that at least we might be well remembered. “Weren't they something those crazy people who simply loved us?” My faith

is such that if God has a purpose for us we will continue to be here; the excited, bored,

kindhearted, reprimanding, frustrating people of God.

*Closing Prayer:* God of all times and places, in Jesus Christ, lifted up on the cross, you opened for us the path to eternal life. Grant that we, being born again of water and the Spirit, may joyfully serve you in newness of life and faithfully walk in your holy ways; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.