



Jesus is a Loser – TouchPoint for August 26, 2020

Matthew 16:21-28 (MSG)²¹⁻²² Then Jesus made it clear to his disciples that it was now necessary for him to go to Jerusalem, submit to an ordeal of suffering at the hands of the religious leaders, be killed, and then on the third day be raised up alive. Peter took him in hand, protesting, “Impossible, Master! That can never be!”²³ But Jesus didn’t swerve. “Peter, get out of my way. Satan, get lost. You have no idea how God works.”

²⁴⁻²⁶ Then Jesus went to work on his disciples. “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 finding yourself, your true self. What kind of deal is it to get everything you want but lose yourself? What could you ever trade your soul for?”

²⁷⁻²⁸ “Don’t be in such a hurry to go into business for yourself. Before you know it the Son of Man will arrive with all the splendor of his Father, accompanied by an army of angels. You’ll get everything you have coming to you, a personal gift. This isn’t pie in the sky by and by. Some of you standing here are going to see it take place, see the Son of Man in kingdom glory.”

Grace and peace from the God in whom we live and move and have our being.

“And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, “God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you.” But Jesus turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me...”

Oh Peter.... Peter, Peter, Peter.... Peter, Peter, Peter, Peter. Peter. Peter. Peter. What a loser! Why can't he just leave well enough alone. He got it right in the verses just before this. In the previous verses, he correctly identified Jesus as the Christ, when Jesus asked, “Who do people say that I am?” Winner!

But this week, not so much. I'm not quite sure why the people who set up the weekly readings split this story of Peter over two weeks. Matthew puts them back to back in his gospel. Peter confesses Jesus as the Messiah, and then immediately messes up. Why split the two? They are all part of the same.

Maybe they divide it because Peter's confession feels so good to preach on. “Who do you say I am?” Jesus asks and we can get real serious about that question as preachers. This is the big issue. This is the ultimate question. “Who do you say Jesus is?” How you answer it determines everything. Your eternal destiny rides on your answer. Just read all the commentaries on this passage. It is so nice to finally preach on it all depending on us. Finally, we get to be the subject and verb of our faith lives. The commentators make last week’s gospel reading seem like an episode of 'You Bet Your Life' with Groucho Marx. Just say the magic word and you are saved, and a duck, or maybe it's a dove, will appear above your head to confirm it. OK, I dated myself with that one. Just 'google' it.

But then this week. And Peter's bumbling and stumbling. “Get thee behind me Satan.” Not exactly an affirming word coming from the Christ to Peter, wouldn't you say.

If it all depends on Peter and his confession. Peter is in big trouble. Because this week, Peter gets it all wrong. Peter is a loser – for wanting to forbid Jesus to be a loser. And we don't like losers. It's one of the worst things you can call someone. We want winners. We worship and celebrate winners. Life is about winning: conquering, defeating, overcoming others. We have sought it since the beginning of time. “Eat of the fruit and you shall not die. You will be god-like.” Now that's a winner. And life is a 'winner take all' game. Right?!? Why, we were even promised in the last presidential election that if we chose the right

person, we would get tired of 'winning'. Well, I sense a lot of weariness in this country right now, but I don't think it's from too much winning.

Look, I like winning. There is a reason I keep a big box in storage that has newspaper clippings from my youth of all my athletic accomplishments and trophies, and I'm not talking about the participation kind. I keep that box so when I am dead and gone and my boys go through my stuff, they will see that their short, dumpy old man – who failed in a myriad of ways as a father – was at one time in his life, a winner. Of course, I also keep it so I can pull it out from time to time and show it to my brother. Because as important as being a winner in this world is, there is nothing that compares to sibling rivalry. Ok. I got off track there.

Look, I like winning. We all do. Life is about winning: conquering, defeating, overcoming others. Life is a 'winner take all' game. Right?!

So, what do we do with such a loser as Peter? Well, maybe that's not the most important question. A better question might be, “What does Jesus ... what does God do... with such a loser?” Peter doesn't seem to get any better as time goes on. On the night before Jesus' death, Peter doesn't just get wrong who Jesus is, he says “I don't even know who he is. Never met the guy.” And yet, the denier this night is given the body and blood of the greatest loser of all. So is the betrayer and the cowards and sleepy heads.

On the cross, Jesus loses it all – his life. On the cross, Jesus joins the losers of the world. On the cross, Jesus becomes one with all of the losers of the world.

It is important to confront that. **JESUS IS A LOSER.** Do those words shock you?

The prophet Isaiah speaks to this when he says, “*He was despised and rejected by all; a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom all hide their faces and was despised, and we esteemed him not.*” That is a description of a LOSER!

Now, since the year 313 A.D. We have equated Christianity with power, and might. Might makes right. And if God is always right, then God must always be mighty. Our image of God has been shaped by invulnerability rather than vulnerability. Conquest rather than loss. So, what do we do with such a loser as Jesus? Well, we crucify him. Turn him into the ultimate loser.

But maybe that's not the most important question, “What do we do with such a loser as Jesus?” A better question might be, “What does God do with such a loser?” Or as Paul says, “This Jesus whom you crucified.” What does God do with such a crucified loser as Jesus?

Well, God raises him from the dead. This is the one God vindicates. It isn't just the resurrection that is the victory. It is who is resurrected that is the victory. God shocks everyone by raising this loser from the dead. God vindicates by making THIS Jesus to be the Lord and Christ. This ever-forgiving, merciful, grace-filled Jesus, who turns the other cheek and loves his enemies.

What a loser!

But God raises this one from the dead. The one who we are absolutely sure cannot and does not represent God and God's ways. God gives victory to the one who loses. It is a victory over our constant need to win, to conquer, to defeat the other. It is a victory over our 'winner takes all' attitude.

Look at our present situation. When the foundation of life is trying to win and defeat the other and a

pandemic hits, we don't know how to care for each other because we're too busy trying to win. And so, in a world of destructive, compulsive winners, how else could Jesus be victorious except by losing. He simply won't play their game.

In Jesus, our sense of victory, our sense of winning, is defeated. Victory, as we define it, is defeated. Those who want to win their life will lose it. And those who lose their life will be given it back. Have trouble believing that? Then talk to people involved in a 12-step program. They will tell you the greatest victory of their lives is when they admitted defeat.

Let me share with you a quote from Richard Rohr:

We don't come to God by doing it right. We come to God by doing it wrong. Any guide of souls knows this to be true. If we come to God by being perfect, no one is going to come to God. This absolutely levels the playing field. It is in doing it wrong, being rejected, and experiencing pain that we are led to total reliance upon God...

This is why Christianity has as its central symbol of transformation a naked, bleeding man who is the picture of failing, losing, and dying . . . Everyone wins because if there's one thing we all have in common, if we're honest, it's our weakness and powerlessness in many areas of our lives. There's a broken, wounded part inside each of us...

Entering the spiritual journey through the so-called negative, or what seems like the back door, takes all elitism out of spirituality, which is its most common temptation. The usual claims which appeal to our ego self ("I am an advanced person") are of no use whatsoever and are actually revealed as much of the problem. The quickest ticket to heaven, enlightenment, or salvation is calmly acknowledged littleness. Then you have nothing to prove, to protect, or to promote. You are already at home base. Our need for daily mercy is our only real boarding pass for heaven. The ego does not like that very much, but the soul fully understands." So writes Richard Rohr.

So, let me try to sum up all this rambling, all this stumbling and bumbling on my part.

You are not saved because who you say Jesus is. You are saved because of who Jesus is. You are not saved because you have identified the Christ. You are saved by the Christ. You are not saved because you are a winner and you got the right answer on the test. Winners don't need saving. You are saved because you are a loser. And you are saved by a loser.

Now most winners have a victory celebration, a victory dinner. Jesus offers something quite different. A Last Supper. A loser dinner. There's Judas, Peter, James and John and the rest of them. All with giant 'L's tattooed on their foreheads that evening. That is who is at this table.

So, come. Come join those losers and me. And be re-membered to the biggest loser of all: Jesus.

Come, be re-membered to Jesus and his way of life – a loser's way of life by our standards.

Come be re-membered to Jesus, the biggest loser of all who God just happened to raise from the dead, and make victorious Lord over all. Because, apparently, "Loser takes all".

Amen

Spirit in the Desert

Opening Song

Be Still

Be Still, know that I am God.

Spirit Divine

Spirit of Love, enfold and teach us.
Spirit of Peace, rest deep within
Spirit of change, transform and heal us
Spirit Divine

Bible Passage

(A passage takes us from one place to another)

Touchpoint

(Where God's story touches our life story)

The Lord's Prayer

The Meal

Healer of Our Every Ill

Healer of our every ill, light of each tomorrow. Give us peace beyond our fear, and hope
beyond our sorrow.

You who know our fears and sadness. Grace us with your peace and gladness.

Spirit of all comfort, fill our hearts. *Refrain*

In the pain and joy beholding, how your grace is still unfolding

Give us all your vision God of love. *Refrain*

Benediction

A Celtic Blessing

The guarding of the God of Life be on you, the guarding of loving Christ be on you,
the guarding of the Holy Spirit be on you, to aid and uphold you each day and night of your life.

The guarding of God, the guarding of Christ, the guarding of the Spirit be upon you.