

Lent 5C: Phil 3 – In God’s Kingdom only losers get the trophy!

1. We learn a lot of life’s lessons through sports
 - a. Think of some of the things we’re taught by participation in them
 - i. Good sportsmanship – it’s not about winning or losing but how you play
 - ii. Teamwork – that how you play has consequences for more than just you
 - iii. And we learn that even if you play hard defeat is a fact of life, that we won’t always win and we have to learn how to handle defeat.
 - b. In the modern world, as many of us have found when we raised our own children, some of the lessons have changed
 - i. It seems that sportsmanship has taken a back seat in many events – not only among the athletes
 - ii. Many of the parents could also use a lesson on sportsmanship and decorum, as they yell at players, coaches, and refs.
 - iii. And defeat isn’t part of the vocabulary – everyone gets a trophy win or lose
 - c. In this area we’ve short-circuited the system
 - i. This is where we learn that how to cope with loss.
 - ii. Because in the real world only the winners get a trophy.
 - d. But when we look at God’s Kingdom it doesn’t work by this basic human rule
 - i. God’s kingdom is even more radical than the modern idea that everyone deserves a trophy for playing.
 - ii. In God’s Kingdom only losers get the trophy and collect the prize – eternal life!
2. That’s what we hear in our Epistle lesson from Philipians.
 - a. In our Epistle lesson Paul uses an athletic analogy to describe our life as Christians, **“Brothers...one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize...”** (Php 3:13-14)
 - i. He pictures our life of faith as an athletic event, a race; not a sprint, but a life-long marathon
 - ii. Looking back and *forgetting* what’s behind...*straining* forward...*pressing on*.
 - iii. These aren’t things you do in a 100 Meter dash, there’s just not enough time.
 - b. Paul is talking about what we put our confidence in to win that race and receive the prize – is it something in us or something that we receive?
 - i. Because there were Jewish preachers who pretended to be Apostles going to churches telling congregations that they had to first follow Jewish Law to be Christian – something that we do.
 - ii. Remember that to the Jewish mind they were the children of God, they had Moses, the Law, the prophets – it was through them the Messiah came
 - iii. It stood to reason in their minds that a person must first be Jewish in order to be a Christian and part of that identity, that confidence in belonging, was male circumcision – you couldn’t be Jewish without it.

- iv. So Paul first sets stage for his argument in vv. 1-3 (not in our reading) by exhorting Philippians not to trust in themselves for salvation, **“Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh. For we are the real circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh...”**
- c. Paul reminds his readers that if anyone had reason for confidence in human accomplishments toward salvation he did:
 - i. **“I...have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more...”** (Php 3:4)
 - ii. He had the right pedigree: circumcised on the eighth day from the tribe of Benjamin, **“a Hebrew of Hebrews.”** (Php 3:5)
 - iii. Then he reminds them that he was a Pharisee - scrupulous about keeping Law
 - iv. Based on the zeal and the outward righteousness by which he had lived if anyone DESERVED heaven (humanly speaking) Paul did.
- d. Yet, he goes on to say, **But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ...”** (Php 3:8-9)
 - i. He’s saying that all of his human accomplishments toward righteousness are worthless...less than that they are rubbish - FILTH
 - ii. There’s no striving for righteousness because we can’t attain it – only Christ is righteous and we receive His righteousness through faith
 - iii. Therefore, Paul concludes by saying that he forgets what lies behind (all previous accomplishments) and strives for what lies ahead the prize of heaven
 - iv. **In the Kingdom of God only losers get the trophy** – those who have lost all hope in their own righteousness and trust in Christ’s righteousness alone!
- 3. Yet people have always placed their hope of heaven in something other than Christ.
 - a. If your confidence isn’t solely in Christ and what He’s done for you then it has to be in something that you’ve done for yourself that makes you worthy of heaven.
 - i. There are two passages from our Lord, that even non-believers know and use to justify themselves when they don’t have faith in Jesus.
 - ii. The Golden Rule is first and foremost, **“Do unto others as you would have done unto you.”** (Luk 6:31)
 - iii. Having done several funerals for those who have never attended church that is most often what the deceased’s family says about their dearly departed, **“God will welcome them because they tried to live by that rule.”**
 - iv. And the other, not as common, is always meant to reveal the departed’s magnanimity, **“Judge not, that you be not judged.”** (Mat 7:1) – so and so

was the most tolerant person in the world, didn't care how anyone else lived as long as they followed rule #1.

- b. Unfortunately, I've heard this kind of justification from the unchurched and churched alike!
 - i. Why do people place so much hope in these two maxims?
 - ii. Because by nature we want to believe...to hope that we made some small contribution to the cause -just like the Jews of Paul's day placed their confidence in their circumcision, their outward identity.
 - iii. Secondly, we also mistakenly expect God to behave like we behave, to value what we value.
 - iv. In life we know that you don't really get a trophy unless you deserve it and unfortunately our sinful hearts apply that logic to our salvation
- c. But when the Word of God is rightly proclaimed and we realize exactly what Paul is saying in this passage we rejoice that we don't have to put ANY confidence in what we've said or what we've done.
 - i. The only thing our accomplishments could do is detract from what Christ has already done.
 - ii. So that we, along with Paul, can rightly say, **"I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ..."** (Php 3:8-9)
 - iii. Did you hear that – you don't have to be good enough...you can't be good enough but One was already good enough for you, for me, for the world!
 - iv. You have to be a loser to win, lose your confidence in your own goodness and place it in Christ who was good for you.
- d. Beloved, your Lord and Savior has already run the race that was set before Him, a race you couldn't possibly run or complete.
 - i. He ran that race, crossing the finish line by His suffering and death on the cross for your sins and rising again as the first-fruits of the resurrection of all believers.
 - ii. So that He could give you a crown of life that you didn't win and you don't deserve because only losers get the trophy in His Kingdom!