

SERMON FOR JULY 2, 2023

TEXT: MATTHEW 10:34-42

THEME: FOLLOWING JESUS IS FOR LOSERS

34 “Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. **35** For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. **36** And a person's enemies will be those of his own household. **37** Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. **38** And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. **39** Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. “Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me. **41** The one who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and the one who receives a righteous person because he is a righteous person will receive a righteous person's reward. **42** And whoever gives one of these little ones even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple, truly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward.”

In the name of Jesus:

In 1962 the New York Mets baseball team managed to lose 120 games that season. In the last game of the season, a player named Joe Pignatano hit into a triple play to end the game, a fitting ending for one of the worst seasons a team had ever had in any sport.

Casey Stengel was the manager of the Mets that year. After the game he called the team together and told them, “Fellas, don't feel bad about this, it has been a team effort.” The Mets were so bad at baseball that year that they were called by some the Lovable Losers.

No one wants to lose, at any time or at anything. But our Lord Jesus Christ encourages, no, He tells us that He expects us to be good at losing when it comes to following Him in our life. In fact, we could say that FOLLOWING JESUS IS FOR LOSERS.

One of the truths of any sport is that you can't win them all, so it is best that you learn how to lose. For the person who follows Jesus, it is also true that we need to learn how to lose. In one sense, we all know what it means to lose, in that when we examine our lives, we come to the realization that each of us have made more than our own fair share of mistakes. Each of us has failed our Lord Jesus in one way or another. In our relationship with Christ, it is not a matter of how good we are. None of us are good in the eyes of the Lord. We are at our core poor miserable sinners. We are wretched, poor, miserable, sick with sin, people who are not right with the Lord. This is something that we have admitted and confessed today and in each of our worship services, that as poor miserable sinners, we justly deserve God's wrath and eternal punishment. In a very real sense, we are all, as sinful human beings, losers. We are in need of pity, in need of mercy, in need of God's help.

I felt that way just this past week. While at a family outing at Cedar Point last Monday, I got motion sickness after getting on one of the rides. I was

in need of help. I wasn't in a state to turn help away. I was at the mercy of those medics who came to offer help. And when help is offered and you need it, you receive it, with a grateful heart.

So too you and I are in need of God's mercy and grace. As sinners we are really and truly sick with sin, and sin will result in our eventual death. But the Good News is that God loves the sinner. He loves losers. We aren't loveable losers, we are losers in every sense of the word. We are not worthy of God's love. Yet God has shown mercy and love toward each of us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ came down from heaven to save sinners. He came down from heaven to not only identify with us but to help us. Jesus set aside His glory for His time here on earth, He humbled Himself. Jesus became like you and me who are lost and are losers. He knew pain and suffering. He was separated from God, rejected by everyone, by His Heavenly Father, by His nation, by the religious leaders of the day, it was just as Isaiah had predicted about Jesus 700 years earlier: "he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions; he

was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.”

Today many companies like to offer their customers “deals” in which you get more than what you wanted. It is called bundling, a concept which identifies what the customer needs then offers extra by joining one service or product to another. So when you sign up for internet services, a company will offer you a discount or a better price if you combine that service with also obtaining phone service or satellite service with the provider.

In your Baptism Jesus has made you His very own child, so that you not only are identified as His child but you are also bundled or joined to Him in your life and in His mission and ministry. Christ has so joined and united you with Himself so that now your sins are forgiven, your life is hidden in Christ, and the power of the Holy Spirit has been poured out upon you so that Jesus now uses you in your life to further His mission in seeking and saving the lost. Jesus uses you and me, we who are many times anxious, fearful, weak in faith, and unimpressive by worldly standards to follow Him so that He can show His power in and through us.

To be a follower of Jesus is to be a loser for Jesus. A loser in that you are a poor sinner in need of His mercy and help in time of need. But a loser in the way that you live your life, just as Jesus says: "Whoever finds His life will lose it and whoever loses His life for My sake will find it." To lose your life in the manner in which Jesus speaks means that throughout your life you seek to continually lose those things which are not pleasing in God's sight: your pride, your arrogance, your anger, your boasting, or anything else that you might offer to God as praiseworthy or commendable. There is nothing we have to offer to God other than our thanks and praise for what He has done for us and for what He continues to do for us. Just in the way the Apostle Paul puts it: "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 might gain Christ and be found in Him. For to me is to live for Christ, and to die is gain." To the glory of God and in Jesus' name.

Amen