

Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost

GOOD NEWS FOR LOSERS

Matthew 16:21-28

Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost Analysis by Ronald C. Neustadt

21From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.²²And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you."²³But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."

²⁴Then Jesus told his disciples, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.²⁵For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.²⁶For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life?²⁷

"For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done.²⁸Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom."

DIAGNOSIS: Losing by Forfeiting (Losing, Period)

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *Objecting to Suffering Service / Steering Clear of the Cross*

Nobody wants to lose. Not money. Not friends. Not security. Not control. And certainly not one's life. We're like Peter in that way (who didn't want his friend, Jesus, to lose, either. One can understand his "rebuke" of Jesus as a friendly attempt to remind Jesus that a loving God would never let that happen to him.) We don't want to lose. We want to gain: monetary profit, friends, security, control (you name it). . . . even if that means ignoring the need of others for mercy. So we often reject any option that involves giving/losing our time, money, energy for the sake of those in need of mercy.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Thinking the Way Human Beings Think Rather Than the Way God Thinks*

Trouble is, that's not the way the only true God thinks. That's setting our minds on human things (literally, "not thinking the thoughts of God, but thinking the thoughts of human beings"). Rejecting any option that involves the giving of ourselves (losing our life) is a symptom of where our trust lies. We might even say, "I can't believe in a God who would let that happen to me." Trying to "save" our lives (time, money, energy) is an indication that we are trusting a god who offers us only what we want: gain, profit, security (you name it) rather than trusting the God who operates by mercy, no matter the cost.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Losing / Forfeiting One's Life While Trying to "Save" It*

Trouble is, if we won't trust the God who operates by mercy no matter the cost, we will end up forfeiting our lives. It won't matter how much we have tried to hold on to our lives just for

ourselves. The Son of Man will be ashamed of us when he comes in the glory of the Father. Not having operated in God's mercy-management system (i.e. having "saved" our lives), in the end we will simply have what we have saved-a life that has now ended. We will have "tasted death" and not seen the Son of Man coming in his kingdom. No one will have seen the Son of Man operating by mercy in and through our lives. We will have lost, period.

PROGNOSIS: Losing by Following (and Gaining by Losing)

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *A Winner Goes the Distance for Losers*

But here comes One who loses himself in showing mercy to us. He promises forgiveness for losers-forgiveness for us who so often keep trusting in ourselves and thinking that we can save our lives by keeping them just for ourselves. He knows that it will be necessary for him to "undergo great suffering ... and be killed" if he is going to follow through on that offer, but he does not hold back. He will not let any "stumbling blocks" trip him up. He follows through on showing us mercy, no matter the cost. Even calls it his "glory." And his heavenly Father concurs.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *His Lead Changes the Way We Think*

That's what gives us the courage to deny all our self-saving tactics. When we "see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom," that is, when we see him undergoing great suffering and being killed in order to swap his forgiveness for our sins, we find ourselves trusting him when he calls us to take up our cross and follow him.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *We Lose Our Lives Willingly for the Sake of the Gospel, Only to See the Kingdom*

Coming with Power

So we lose our lives, not because we have forfeited them out of fear, but because we are eager to be like him, showing mercy and repeating his promise to others, no matter the cost. And that kind of losing, Jesus assures us, is a kind of losing we don't need to fear because it's his kind of losing. Not losing by forfeit. Not losing, period. But losing God's way: Losing with a future. You might even call it winning.