

WINNING

Winning. We all like that winning feeling, don't we? Winning brings us accolades, acceptance, power, control. To the victor belongs the spoils. From the first few times we manage to prevail in competitions, whether from superior skills or plain old dumb luck, winning hooks us.

Those of us who engage in sports, either directly on the field or court, or indirectly in the bleachers or on the sofa, know the thrill of being part of something bigger than ourselves within competition. The deep connections that come from loyalty to "our team, our side," the dedicated preparation of the competitors to be fitter, smarter, stronger than the competition, the giddy exultation when "we" prevail in the fray, and the collective focus on the wise mantra that "winning isn't everything; it's the only thing."

From the elementary school playground on, we learn how to choose the winning team, how to be winners. And we bitterly complain and suffer when we fall short, when our strategies fail or our preparation proves to be insufficient. Because no one likes to be a loser—the one who is weaker, unchosen, vulnerable, disempowered, vanquished. In fact, we like winning so much that we have applied the winning principle within many cultural institutions as the measure of success: business negotiations, political frays, church life.

But, see, Jesus of all people mucks up winning for those of us in the church. He stands with the losers—those who are not fitter, smarter, insiders, power brokers. He calls us to be servants, those who occupy humbled roles. He reminds us that competition amounts to nothing more than vanity in which we can puff ourselves up for a brief moment.

He asks us not to compete with others, but to care for them. Not to align our fortunes with the winners, but to sit with those who are cast out. Not to think and act for our own advantage, but to think and act to lift up everyone around us, especially those whom we consider "the least." He invites us to step away from contention, from the joy of vanquishing the competition, to think and act in a different frame, a "better way." He encourages us to be accountable for our missteps—when we hurt others, when we act from selfish motivations, when we promise more than we can deliver, when we fall short.

Following Christ is more important than winning—we know this, right?

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