

Winners & Losers

[Luke 6:27-38](#)

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On Thursday night, there was a very important hockey game between Team Canada and Team USA in the final of the Four Nations tournament. I didn't watch the game – I was here at choir practice for most of the night – but I confess I was checking the score every so often while we were practicing, and I know at least a few other choir members were doing the same, and there was great celebration when Christine announced that Canada had scored in overtime to win the game and the tournament. Canada winning Gold at a hockey tournament is always worth celebrating, but this one was particularly meaningful because of all the other stuff that's been going on outside of the hockey world – threats of tariffs, annexation and conquest from our closest neighbour and longtime ally meant that the game on Thursday was no longer about just hockey – instead of friendly rivals, these two teams were playing like bitter enemies. There are few things more satisfying than seeing a bully defeated – when someone strong picks on someone weaker, we want to see them punished, we want to stand up to them and force them to back down, we want to see the good guys win and the bullies lose.

And if you feel that way, and then you turn in your Bibles to the passage we heard this morning from the Gospel of Luke, you might not find this passage all that helpful. You might even grumble a little, and wonder

why Jesus is being such a pushover. Love your enemies? Do we have to? If anyone slaps you on the cheek, let him slap the other one? Come on, Jesus! That can't be right! This sure sounds like Jesus is telling us to give in to all the bullies in the world, don't fight back, just roll over and give them whatever they want – if someone takes Crimea, give them Kyiv as well. We don't want the bullies to win – we don't want to reward bad behaviour, make people think that if they go around making threats and demands, they'll get whatever they want. So why does Jesus seem to be siding with the bullies here? Why doesn't Jesus want us to fight back?

And it's important for us to state clearly that this is not what Jesus is asking of us – meek submission to evil, allowing those who are suffering to continue to suffer, that is absolutely not what Jesus is telling us here. Far too many times, this scripture has been used to justify passivity in the face of aggression, telling abused spouses and children to keep suffering at the hands of their abusers, and that is not what Jesus wants for his people. We are not meant to stay in suffering, to stay in misery, to resign ourselves to bad things by saying that this is the only way they can be. All throughout the Bible, God demands justice for the poor, the weak, the vulnerable and the oppressed; all throughout the Bible, God speaks against those who would use their wealth, their power, their strength to control and bully their weaker neighbours. In fact, that's what Jesus said in the passage immediately before the one we read today, where Jesus gave blessings to the poor, the hungry, the suffering and abused, while pronouncing judgment

and woe on the rich, the comfortable, the self-satisfied. Jesus has just made it perfectly clear that relying on your own strength and wisdom and power to try and force the people around you to submit to your will can only lead you to misery and pain and death. So when Jesus tells his followers to love their enemies and turn the other cheek, he isn't telling us to let the bullies win, let the bad guys win, he's telling us they've already lost. Anyone who uses their power to harm the world around them will only end up hurting themselves. Anyone who tries to win through force will always, always lose in the end.

And that's why Jesus tells his followers to respond to that kind of evil in the world with love. We often hear this passage and think that Jesus is telling us to be weak, to submit to evil, to roll over and let the bullies do whatever they want, but that's not what real love looks like. That's not what Jesus is calling us to do. The love that Jesus calls us to is not passive, it's active – we're called not to slink away in retreat, or to strike back in anger, but to respond with strength and courage in the face of the evil we encounter. When we respond to violence with more violence, or if we just submit and allow violence to continue, we're allowing the bullies to set the rules of the game – we're playing by their terms, according to their rules, and then even if we think we've won, we're still stuck in the same cycle of violence and power that tries to control the world around us. When Jesus tells us to respond to that violence with love, he's telling us to stop thinking

in terms of winning and losing – stop thinking that we have to either fight back to win, or concede defeat and run away.

Jesus wants us to stop seeing conflict from our human perspective, and instead see it the way he sees it. So often when we see the world, we only see what we lack, what we need, and we think that we need to hold on to what we have and protect it from those who would try to take it away. We start seeing the world as one big conflict, where somebody has to win and somebody has to lose, because there isn't enough for everyone to go around, and so we start scrabbling and fighting over the little scraps of what we think is important. But when Jesus started his ministry in the gospel of Luke, he proclaimed that this way of seeing the world, as a place of winners and losers, where everyone had to fight to survive and get ahead, that world was over and done with. Jesus proclaimed that “the Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor, freedom for the prisoners, sight for the blind, liberty for the oppressed, to proclaim that the year of God's favour has arrived!” Jesus didn't enter the world to show us how to solve our problems and help us defeat our enemies. Jesus came to transform the world, to bring the kingdom of heaven into this world, to make our world and our lives part of the kingdom of heaven once and for all. And in the kingdom of heaven, in the year of God's favour, there is no such thing as winners or losers. God's kingdom is a kingdom of abundance, of celebration, of overwhelming, unlimited blessings and grace, and when you know that you're part of that kingdom, when you

know that God is going to care for you and supply all your needs and pour out endless blessings on you, then you can start to see all that fighting and striving that used to seem so important for what it truly is – pointless, foolish, trivial. When you know that the creator of the universe loves you, that he died for your sake to save you from sin and death, what use can you possibly have for petty squabbles over possessions and power and prestige? When you know what abundance is waiting for you – what overflowing blessings belong to you because you belong to God – then all the posturing and posing of all the world's bullies just seem ridiculous, they cannot threaten you, they cannot defeat you, they have no power over you. You can't win or lose, because you aren't playing their game, you aren't following their rules, you're living in the Kingdom of heaven and following the way of Jesus Christ.

And don't get me wrong – this still isn't easy. The temptations to get drawn back into these conflicts, to fight fire with fire and hatred with hatred, to strike back as hard as you can when you're attacked, or else just withdraw and passively give in to injustice and evil and let it continue to flourish, those temptations will always be there. They will always persist. Living as citizens of the kingdom of heaven in this broken world means standing up for what is right without doing wrong, it means speaking the truth with gentleness and love even in the face of a torrent of lies, it means laying down the weapons of war and taking up the sword of the spirit, the armour of righteousness, the shield of faith, and relying on the strength that comes

from God's love and grace to protect us from the attacks we will face. And when we struggle to carry on loving our enemies when it feels like they're all around us, it helps to remember that we have the Holy Spirit with us to show us how to love, to demonstrate God's love for us so that we can love our enemies in the same way. When we need to see what real love looks like, we look to Jesus Christ – we see how he loved his enemies, how he forgave them as they crucified him, how he gave everything he had, even his own life, for the sake of those who despised and condemned him. We know that Jesus is capable of this kind of love, because he gave that love to us when he died for us on the cross, and we know that God's love is stronger than death because we know that God raised Jesus Christ from the dead to live forever in the kingdom of heaven. And we know that if Jesus can love like that, we can too, because Jesus is with us here. Through his Holy Spirit, Jesus makes us capable of loving others the way we've been loved, showing mercy the same way we received God's mercy and grace, so we can give to others in the same way God gives to us.

As disciples of Jesus Christ, as citizens of the kingdom of heaven, we are called to look at this world and stop seeing winners and losers, stop trying to get ahead and control the outcome, and instead trust that the love of Jesus Christ is strong enough to bless us with everything we need, to protect us and strengthen us and carry us through every kind of trouble, every kind of pain. We have nothing to fear from our enemies. They can't defeat us. They can't conquer us. And the way we are called to conquer the world is

through love – courageous, bold, active love, love that reveals the way of Jesus Christ to the world around so that even our enemies can discover what it truly means to be part of the kingdom of heaven. Today, in this broken world, may we love boldly, so that all the blessings of Almighty God will flow abundantly out from this church to the ends of the earth, so the world will know the year of God's favour has arrived. In the name of Jesus Christ – Amen!