

Bethlehem Lutheran Church
A Reconciling Works Congregation of the ELCA welcoming the LGBTQ community
- A multicultural, all-inclusive ecumenical ministry

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The Rev. Dr. David O. Guss, Fr., Ph.D.

November 26, 2017 – Christ the King Sunday
“Be A Winner For Christ Today”

The story is told about a man who had been driving all night and when morning came, he still had a far way to go. He decided he had to get some sleep. So, he found a city park and pulled into a parking spot so he could get an hour or two of sleep. It just so happened he had chosen a quiet place on a very popular jogging route. So, just as he laid back and was starting to doze off, there was a knock on his window. He woke up. “Yes,” he said. “Excuse me, sir,” the jogger said, “do you have the time?” The man looked at the car clock and answered, “8:15.” The jogger said thanks and left. The man settled back and was just dozing off when there was another knock on the window and another jogger stopped by wanting to know the time. “Excuse me, sir, do you have the time?” “8:25!” the man replied. The jogger said thanks and left. The man could see other joggers passing by and he knew it was only a matter of time before another one asked for the time. Quickly he got out a pen and paper, and posted a note on his truck window that read, “I do not know the time,” and then he settled back to sleep. Just as he was dozing off, there was another knock at the window. “Sir, sir?” said a jogger wanting to be helpful, “It is 8:45!” Sometimes, no matter how hard you try, you just can’t win. It’s true for all of us at one time or another, right?

We have a term for it, Murphy’s Law: “If anything can go wrong, it will.” And, its corollary: “If anything can’t go wrong, it will go wrong anyway.” Someone once made a list of ideas related to how Murphy’s Laws apply to computers. For example, this person explains: *As soon as you delete a file you no longer need – you will need it. *Installing a new program will always mess up at least 1 old one. *There are only 2 kinds of computer users: Those whose hard drives have crashed, and those whose hard drives haven’t crashed ...yet. *And, finally, this one - anything can be made to work if you fiddle with it. But, if you fiddle with something long enough, you’ll break it. Can I get a hearty “Amen!” from that statement. Amen!

Of course, some people have more than their share of bad luck. We label them losers. I suppose there is no sadder label that can be attached to someone than that, loser. Maybe there have been times when you thought of yourself as a loser. But, you are never a loser in God’s eyes. AMEN! David Barber, a Lutheran pastor in Honolulu, tells a fascinating story about a man by the name of William Henry Brisbane who was given the label of loser by an institution in the 19th century called the Mercantile Agency. An informant for the Mercantile Agency reported that Brisbane had failed in every occupation he had ever tried, including farming, publishing, and even practicing medicine. The report also predicted that he would likely fail for the rest of his life. The biggest evidence for this conclusion was the fact that Brisbane had inherited \$100,000, which was a huge fortune in those days, and apparently he had spent most of this \$100,000 in a very short time just like many lottery winners lose their money right away. But, the way Brisbane lost his money was not by reckless spending. Actually, Brisbane had been a successful South Carolina plantation owner. But, he had decided that slavery was wrong. As a result he sold his plantation and moved north. But, then he felt guilty about leaving his slaves behind. He used the \$100,000 he inherited to buy his slaves back and set them free. The Mercantile Agency may have labeled him a loser, but, I suspect, that God labeled William Henry Brisbane as an extraordinary winner. Think about that story for a moment in the light of today’s text from the Gospel of Matthew. It is a powerful one. Christ tells a story that indicates that when Christ sets up his kingdom there will be some clear losers, in fact they will lose everything worth having. And, there will also be some clear winners, people who will have it all. Let’s read today’s Gospel together and listen to how Jesus describes who will win and who will lose:

31 “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. 32 All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, 33 and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left.” (If you haven’t figured it out to this point, the sheep are the winners; the goats are losers.) 34” Then, the king will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world;’ Now, listen to what made the sheep winners: 35 “...for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, 36 I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.” Then, the winners will answer him - actually it says, the righteous will answer him, but “winners” will do just as well: 37 “Then, the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? 38 And, when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? 39 And, when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’ 40 And, the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family] you did it to me.’” If you haven’t figured it out to this point, the sheep are winners; the goats are losers. 41 “Then, he will say to those at his left hand, ‘You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; 42 for I was hungry and

you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, 43 I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.” The losers also will answer: 44 “Then, they also will answer, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?’ 45 Then he will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.’” Then, says Jesus, 46 “And, these [the losers] will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.” This Gospel is powerful! How many of you want to be losers? Let me see your hands. I didn’t think so. How many of you want to be winners? Do you think, in light of this text, that it might be good to reassess our priorities in life? We might start here: what does it mean to have it all? A yacht? A private jet? A brand new Mercedes in the driveway? A mansion on the beach?

An e-mail magazine called HELP 4 SUNDAY shared a true story from a pastor named Max who works with the homeless and street people in the Ft. Lauderdale, FL area. Max became friends with one such street person named Archie. Archie has severe gout in each foot and can barely walk. Each day he sells the Ft. Lauderdale paper out on the sidewalk. Selling the daily newspaper is his livelihood - whether feeling bad, sick, tired - rain or shine, Archie sells those papers. He lives in a little one room apartment that rents by the day. He depends on the sales of each day’s papers to pay for his rent, food, and utilities.

One day Max noticed that Archie had an excited look on his face; he could hardly contain himself. He told Max that he just had to come and see his apartment to see something. Max, being a little hesitant to go down this darkened area to where Archie live, went with Archie and when they arrived at the apartment, Archie explained to Max that each day he had been saving money. He then threw open the door, held out his arms out, and said, “Look!” And, there in this dingy, small one-room apartment was a sofa, ripped and torn with all the stuffing coming out – but, it belonged to Archie. There was a junky little black and white TV, no rabbit ears - but a bent coat hanger, and there was even a recliner chair - all Archie’s. It was evident that Archie had saved a long time to have anything “this nice.” Archie looked at Max and said, “I have all I need now.” Can you imagine that? Suddenly, however, Max noticed a big ‘ol man stretched out in the recliner. Max recognized him as another street person. Archie didn’t mention him, but as big as he was, it was hard not to notice him. Max asked, “Archie, what is he doing here?” And, here is Archie’s response: “He needs a place to stay. Now that I have all I need, don’t you think I should share with others what I have?”

Let me ask each 1 of you here this morning, do you have everything you need? I didn’t say everything you want. Do you have everything you need? Then, friend, you have it all. If you are a follower of Jesus Christ and you have all you need, there’s no way in the world you could ever be a loser. At least you can’t, if you are as smart as Archie. When asked about the homeless person on his sofa, Archie answered, “He needs a place to stay. Now that I have all I need, don’t you think I should share with others what I have?” I’m tempted to leave you with that question hanging in the air: “Now that I have all I need, don’t you think I should share with others what I have?” That is to say, I think sometimes we really need to rethink all of our priorities and values in light of today’s text.

This is the day we celebrate Christ the King. This is the day we celebrate Jesus as our priority in life. This is the day that we are reminded there will come a time when Christ will reign over all. Jesus has already made this very clear - when that day comes, everything as we know it will be turned on its head. Those who think they are winners will suddenly find that they are, in fact, losers. And, those we so often label as losers will be at the front of the pack. It is because winners understand that God’s plan for the world is what he lived his life for - that loving, sharing, and looking out for the weak and less fortunate is the way of Christ. “When the Son of Man comes, he will sit on his glorious throne and separate the people as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep (the winners) on his right and the goats (the losers) on his left.” Who we believe are winners and who are losers says a lot about where we will stand on the Day of Judgment. Replace your material priorities with spiritual priorities today and begin being a winner for Christ the King today, now, and forevermore. Amen.

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