

A parishoner told me about a funeral he went to in the Deep South. The African American preacher leading the service began his funeral sermon with a real zinger. He said, "Everybody wants to go to Heaven, but nobody wants to die!"

Everybody wants to go to Heaven, but nobody wants to die. What a great line. It is multilayered in meaning. There is the obvious meaning, useful at funeral. Life in Heaven requires death on earth, of course.

But "everybody wants to go to Heaven, but nobody wants to die" also exposes the human desire to leap right into glory and ease and happiness (heaven), always avoiding hurt and pain and suffering (death). This is the way the Kingdom of this world operates. We want to do everything in our power to achieve the good life and everything in our power to avoid the bad life. Everybody wants to go to Heaven, but nobody wants to dies.

I'm right there, aren't you? I'm a good foot soldier in the Kingdom of this world. It makes perfect sense to keep on the sunny side, always on the sunny side, to keep on the sunny side of life. It also makes sense to use whatever means necessary to stay on the sunny side. It seems inbred in us – remember the old fight or flight instinct when faced with danger?

Jesus, however, does not operate according to the rules of the Kingdom of this world. Jesus is a King, as we acknowledge on this Christ the King Sunday. Jesus is a King, but as He says in the gospel this morning, His Kingdom "*is not of this world,*" "*not from this world.*"

Jesus is on trial. His life is at stake. Nobody wants to die, including Jesus, but His death is imminent. Pilate questions Jesus, asks Him if He is the King of the Jews. Jesus responds, "*My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might be delivered over to the Jews. But my Kingdom is not from the world.*"

Jesus is a King. But His Kingdom is not of this world. His Kingdom, he goes on to say is true. He came into the world to bear witness to the truth. And everyone who listens to his voice is of the truth.

What are we to make of this? We've already said that it seems right to us that we should do all in our power to avoid distress, pain, and death. Nobody wants to die. And yet, according to Jesus, this strategy is of the Kingdom of this world. If Jesus had followed the rules of this kingdom, then He would have had his followers fight for his release.

In fact, when He is arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane, His disciples draw their swords, ready to protect their Lord; they are good foot soldiers of the Kingdom of this world. But Jesus, whose Kingdom is not of this world, forbids it. He says, *“Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels?”* And yet, this King does not rely on earthly or heavenly protection. Jesus willingly leaves the sunny side and walks straight into the dark side.

This seems crazy to most of us. Fight or flight, but do not willingly acquiesce, as Jesus seems to do. Accept defeat? Admit failure? Embrace suffering? Boast in weakness? Reveal powerlessness? That is counter-intuitive. The coach of an NFL football team was chided and reprimanded last week for crying in front of his players at a team meeting. This is not how the kingdom of this world does things!

And yet, Jesus says He came to testify to the truth. And perhaps, the ways of the Kingdom of the World, although they seem reasonable and right, just might not be true.

Kate Daughdrill was our Arts Minister at Christ Church for 2 years. She is extremely accomplished; she lived on the Lawn as an undergrad, conceived and began both our Makers Series and the Garage, our Arts Venue. She’s now at Cranbrook Academy of Art outside of Detroit getting her Masters in Fine Arts. If anyone can play and win by the rules of the world’s kingdom, it’s Kate Daughdrill. And yet, she has seen the deeper truth in Jesus’ Kingdom and lives her life listening to His voice.

The conceptual core for her art this semester is a very not of the Kingdom of this World idea. It’s the phrase *“I feel like I win when I lose.”* Kate made a hand embroidered sign *“I feel like I win when I lose”* and put it in the courtyard of her school where all the smokers go to smoke. (Smokers, by the way, are the new lepers of the society. Smokers by their very smoking, are cast-outs, cast out of smoke free environments. )

At first, when people saw the sign, they did not understand it. They felt sorry for whoever made the sign and put it in public. Some thought it was a desperate plea for help from a deranged person! But then, over time, its truth emerged. The truth from His Kingdom bubbled up into the Kingdom of this world. One girl, Julia, confessed that the sign meant so much to her and several other smokers. They would think about it and talk about it. Kate learned that some inner city teachers from Detroit came and saw the sign and they loved it. They felt like it was so true.

Kate said that she had one girl walk in her studio and say *“Oh my gosh! You did that! I looked at that sign over the past month and fell in love with it. I even journaled about it one day. I think I understand it a little.”*

I feel like I win when I lose is of Jesus’ Kingdom of Truth. And since it is true, it resonates with people. Not just those who listen to the King’s voice, but even people

who are longing for the truth. I feel like I win when I lose embraces the Kingdom of which Jesus is King. The Kingdom where the King says, *"if anyone would save their life, he must lose it."* And those who are of the truth listen to the King's voice. The Kingdom where the King says, *"I tell you the truth, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit."* Nobody wants to die, but those who listen to the truth believe the King who tells the truth.

I feel like I win when I lose. Those who recognize the King's voice will begin to understand it. Those who hear the King say, *"my power is made perfect in your weakness"* will even begin to feel like they win when they lose. Those who listen to the King's voice might begin to realize that the only way to the Heaven that everybody wants is through the death that nobody wants.

When you lose by the world's standards, find yourself welcomed by Jesus Christ. When your heart breaks, you lose your job, you are rejected or defeated, you wind up outside the sunny side, you look beside you and find Jesus Christ right next to you. It is through dying that you live, even in this life.

A man named David Hawkins discovered this. In his autobiographical book, *The Useful Sinner*, Hawkins tells the story of how his life unraveled. As a very successful South Carolina lawyer, Hawkins was at the top of the world's Kingdom. Wealth, success, and all the trappings. In his early forties, he had an affair and was exposed as an adulterer. As he says, *"the layers of betrayal, deceit, and stupidity covered a period of 18 months and were so convoluted I knew there was no escape."* He thought of suicide, but...nobody wants to die.

Instead, Hawkins confessed to his wife; God then began to rebuild his life. The consequences were severe, but Hawkins began to find real life, true life. *The Useful Sinner* tells the story of a man died according to the World's Kingdom, and became a useful sinner who listens to the King's voice of truth. As Hawkins says, *"I now accept the pain of facing some truths as a birth-pain which cannot be avoided and precedes a new and complete life."*

David Hawkins, felt like he won when he lost. Jesus Christ, won our life when He lost His own. The truth of this defeat turned victory becomes the pattern of life for all who listen to His voice.

Amen.