

Last Sunday when I came home from church, I turned on the TV, of course, to find the end of the British Open Golf Championship. Now I know that many of you don't care about golf, perhaps not about sports of any kind, and I am sensitive about that so I don't offer illustrations from the world of sports every Sunday. But I decided to go ahead this time.

The first thing I saw was a wayward tee shot, about 100 yards to the right of the fairway. That is pretty bad, even for an amateur. It was an "oh-no," head-in-the-hands kind of moment.

I turned on the TV in time to see the shot but not the person taking the shot. It turned out to be Jordan Spieth, who had blown a 3 stroke lead up to that point, and would end up losing another because of the tee shot, with 5 holes to play.

In a remarkable performance over the next four holes, Spieth would make three birdies and an eagle, to win the championship. That is very good.

Like a quarterback who throws an interception that turns into a touchdown for the other team, and then throws five touchdown passes to lead his team to victory, or a baseball player who gets hit by a pitch and then hits three home runs in his next three at-bats.

Romans chapter 8 is one of the high points of scripture. It is the culmination of Paul's long theological address to the church at Rome and a statement of faith that has inspired every generation of Christians since it was written some 1940 years ago, or so.

The two previous Sundays along with the present one have divided the chapter into three readings and before that we were confronted with the end of the 7th chapter, in which Paul sets forth one of the fundamental problems of our humanity; the trouble we have because we want to do good but can't seem to do it.

He then provides a paradigm to help us understand both the struggle with sin and the relationship with God by proclaiming that we are God's family, heirs of God, co-heirs with Christ.

The human situation is presented in a universal way, involving the whole creation. In a string of memorable one-liners Paul goes on a rant that reaches the heights.

Romans 7 is the wayward tee shot. Paul has written the human race into a predicament it would take miracles to escape. But then shot after shot he rises us up on wings like eagles.

“Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”

“For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received a spirit of sonship crying out ‘Abba.’”

“I consider that all our present sufferings are not worth comparing to the glory about to be revealed in us.”

“For the creation was subjected to frustration in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.”

It is a flurry of birdie putts one right after the other.

“We do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.”

We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”

“For those God foreknew he also predestined, to be conformed to the likeness of his son . . . and those whom he predestined, he also called, those he called he also justified, and those justified, are also glorified.”

Now the eagles are coming soon to be capped off by a flurry of aces, holes-in-one, that leave us scrambling to process it all.

Questions

Even Paul says, “what shall we say?” And what can we say? Sometimes there is no way to preach the bible without just letting it preach itself. Paul asks questions right out in the empty space.

“If God is for us, who can be against us?”

“The one who did not spare his own son . . . how will he not also . . . graciously give us all things?”

“Who will bring a charge against those whom God has chosen?”

“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?”

“We face death all day long, like sheep to be slaughtered?”

Answers

And then he lets loose one more great one-liner to keep our spirits up. “No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.”

It is a rant! A glorious rant! It is a barrage of powerful words spoken like the beat of a drum, almost without any grammar to help it along, as if when we draw near to the deepest things of God our words can contain less and less of the meaning until we are left speechless by the grandeur of it all.

There is a rhythm to it like the end of a symphony, like the end of the 1812 Overture with its cannon fire like at the Delaware 4th of July concert.

“I am convinced that neither:

Death nor life
Angels nor demons
The present nor the future
Nor any powers
Neither height nor depth,”

and for good measure, “nor anything else in all creation, can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

What Does It Mean?

Much of the bible is spent asking questions about evil and pain and suffering. There is even a book in the OT called “Lamentations” which consists of five poems crying out in pain over the Babylonian crisis, when Jerusalem was conquered and destroyed along with its

temple. The foundation of NT devotion is the condition that the victim a capital punishment saved the world.

Try as we might, it is hard to let ourselves feel the desperate pain this glorious rant rises up out of.

It means that no matter how frustrated we may become over our circumstances in our personal lives, no matter how many fumbles or errors or wayward tee shots, we will not become discouraged.

It means that no matter how concerned we are about the national political situation or the international sphere, no matter how unspeakably big the world’s problems are: Poverty and religious strife, a looming environmental disaster, the threat of nuclear war, the possible breaking down of the global economy, we will not be crushed in spirit.

It means we will continue to work to better ourselves, to be healthier, to nurture kindness, generosity, integrity, compassion, love, joy, peace and all the rest. And it means we will live diligently and hopefully to solve problems and make this life better without regard to setbacks.

It means trusting in the victory of goodness. It means we will put off the bad like taking off dirty clothes, and put on the good like new garments, getting ready for the celebration . . .

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