

"A WAY OF SEEING" LUKE 22: 24-34

I. The baseball season is well under way and the hearts of kids everywhere are pounding like a big base drum. Many of those kids are 30-40-50 year olds, particularly those with little kids who play on a team somewhere bringing excitement and a possibility of stardom into bold relief.

If you have ever shared the tasks of coach or family support crew you know the drill. Teach them to throw a ball straight and hard, hit it when it comes to you, solidly and often, or catch it always by sweetly scooping it up in that soft and oily smelling glove that ballplayers soon come to love as extensions of their very own arms.

It is an impossible task. Kids throw balls wildly, hit them well only rarely, and drop as many as they catch. Sometimes other things distract them. My son was all decked out in hat and glove in far center field when he yelled to me, "Dad! I'm bored!" And soon he plopped down and was picking as many daisies as his little 5 year old hand could hold as the balls rolled past him.

A few practice sessions make realists of all youth baseball instructors. Questions like, *"How do we get them to play well,"* change to, *"How good is good enough?"* or *"How do we help them do their best and still keep them enjoying the game!"* But we parents have a hard time letting go of some of our vain imaginings of glory!

II. Most of us struggle with how much to expect or demand of the people and things we love in terms of performance. I realized my kids weren't going to be great players, but they were good enough. They took it seriously, liked the game, the practices, their teammates, and

contributed well. So the tension for me was between exerting pressure that would make them better but may cost a price of a joyless game,..... or feeling guilty about not demanding enough and running the risk of selling them short by not establishing a standard of excellence that would serve them well all their lives.

I read recently of the results of studies that spelled out the dangers of perfectionistic fathers who created ulcer and heart-attack prone sons and daughters. I remembered Aquinas' definition of pride, which he called the root of all sin. He said, "*Pride an inordinate desire to excel.*" I do not ever want to create a seedbed for pride in my children.

On the other hand, much can speak of what happens when parents never challenge their children to do their very best. In our generation, "*Mediocrity*" is the new swearword among young families.

All this is vaguely present in these words of Jesus to Peter. "*Peter, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon.*" And what did Jesus reveal that He believed was the most important element in his toolbox of winning characteristics? "*I have prayed that your faith would not fail!*" Skill, hard work, notwithstanding, one should never lose sight of the point of baseball....to enjoy the game! For Peter, zeal, strength of conviction, forcefulness, all were in his arsenal. But without seeing things through God's eyes, the **eyes of faith**, all was lost and Peter was the devil's playground!

As foolish as it may sound, a church without seeing things as God sees them, a church that may have all the polish and warmth that we cherish but has not the faith to withstand the temptations of conforming to the culture

around it, has become something else, but not a church of the living God.

Jesus prayed for Peter. *"Satan wants to put you to the test, and test you he will! My prayer is that by faith you will not give in to another way of seeing things other than the way God sees."* It will take everything you have, being well informed of God's view, being well practiced at your convictions, being strong enough in the greatest challenges to mind, body and soul- your thoughts, your health, your spiritual reserves-it will take faith in God's power. *"I pray that your faith will not fail."*

That is a prayer we all need. That is the prayer we can all speak. It is the way Jesus prayed. It is the thing for us to be praying for each other and our church. Our faith is a way of seeing as God sees. In fact, faith gives us sight of things to come. **That is called vision.** Woodrow Wilson is credited with saying, *"No one that does not see visions will ever realize any high hope or undertake any high mission."* Visions of possibilities, visions of tomorrow, visions of how impossible things can work out and become possible, visions of what we can be with God's help, visions of what we must do to please God.

Most people are not people of vision. In a church of hundreds, or thousands there may only be a few. Some churches bewail the scarcity, **but it only takes a few.** A visionary leader of the past identified it when he said, *"Some people look at the way things are and ask WHY; others look at the way things could be and ask WHY NOT?"* **A church only needs a few people of vision.** Jesus saw the possibility for Peter, and He claimed to build his church on that very rock of Peter's vision, *"Thou art the Christ!"*

People with vision don't have to be on the cutting edge of all that is new. Take the field of medicine for example. Most US physicians are not researchers, and most hospitals are not teaching hospitals. Rather, most doctors treat patients on the basis of what they learned in Med. School or learned in Seminars or Journals.

When any Christian or congregation knows that God is always moving in new ways to reach the needs of His people, we need only to be willing to learn, evaluate, plan and adopt the visionary ways offered to move a church forward and to meet the needs of the people of our generation that God has given us to reach. Jesus prayed that Peter's faith would not fail as he moved forward to lead God's church. When Peter preached at Pentecost, he was a changed man, his faith was not failing!

Visions give us glimpses that can turn into vain imagining, and we begin to want to be the best. We can misplace our focus and want the skills, the polish, the things that keep us succeeding and on top. Just then we need to remember Jesus' words to Peter. He prayed for his faith, not his power or his skills, because faith is what is first behind all of the rest; it is the element that we cannot do without.

Faith overcomes. It overcomes the doubt that holds us back. It overcomes the purposelessness that eventually wraps us up into the smallest package known to mankind. The secret is to fight the good fight of believing faith, the stuff that overcomes. Jesus prayed for Peter's faith to not fail!

We do not have to be good at everything. We do have to keep faith through which we do everything. Jesus prayed for Peter to have the

the FAITH to Seek after God.....

the FAITH to Discern the will of God.....

the FAITH to Obey a merciful God.....

Peter was never perfect. He was loud, brash, over promising and under delivering, presumptuous, denying his convictions for convenience...but Jesus loved him! Jesus knew him, loved his spirit, loved the possibilities, and saw in him all that God had intended for him to be. Jesus had a vision of what Peter could be! Jesus prayed he would have faith in tough times.....that he would have the faith to stand the tests..... that he would have the faith to do what he professed he believed....the faith to become what God had given him to be....

As I listen to our prayers, most of our praying is for God to get us out of trouble, to release us from illness, to help us avoid the consequences of our poor behavior. We pray for health and well being, period. What if we understood each other that same way Jesus understood Peter, that his greatest overarching need was for his faith to not fail..... what if we understood the church congregation in the same way..... what if we prayed for FAITH, for the **vision to see** as God sees so that we might not fail.

Today is a new day for you at Tryon First Baptist. Would we be better off if everybody was in perfect health? If no one had Cancer? Heart disease? Accidents? If all went well but our faith was weak and failed, what would all of it be worth? *"What does it profit anyone to gain the whole world but to lose their soul, their very center of faith, the confidence that God is indeed God and for us, and believe HIM with all our hearts?"*

Jesus prays for our faith, for us to believe in our God and the good news of His love at all turns in the road. Real Life

takes FAITH to overcome, to be a winner, to stand the test. You and I must have it. The congregation must have it, bravely, resolutely.

This we must pray for.....With Faith we have all things, the keys to the kingdom.....without it we have nothing.

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