

## How People of Faith Respond to Bitter Defeat

1. Sunday's sermon began with a story about a seesaw battle between a Lamborghini and a moped. Of all the vehicles you've ever owned, what's your favorite – and why?
2. On Sunday we began a new series called "Seven Biblical Promises That Anchor Our Sanity and Support our Serenity." We began with a promise that's critical to our ability to overcome bitter defeat. For many of us, the recent election was a bitter defeat. Beyond that, though, we all experience many kinds of bitter defeat in our personal life – things like loss of a job, financial insolvency, divorce, death of a loved one, death of a dream, a seesaw battle with addiction, a devastating health diagnosis, or a huge moral failure. Everywhere we look, life is riddle with failure and defeat.
  - a. As the reality of the recent election settles into your soul, how are you feeling at this point – and how does that compare to a week ago?
  - b. As you look back over your life, what's one of the bitterest personal defeats you've experienced? How did you feel when it first happened?
3. We cannot succeed in life until we learn to fail well. For guidance, we looked to the experience of Jesus' earliest followers when he was crucified. His disciples believed he was the long-awaited Messiah destined to deliver their nation from Roman occupation and to usher in a golden age of peace and prosperity. For them, this was essentially a political vision. Their hopes soared when throngs of believers welcomed Jesus as king on Palm Sunday. But then in less than a week, Jesus was arrested. At his trial there was a public backlash, as throngs of skeptics chanted, "Away with him! We have no king but Caesar!" The disciples were stunned! How could their own countrymen make such devastating choice? When Jesus died, so did the hopes and dreams of his disciples.
  - a. What kinds of emotions do you imagine the disciples felt in the aftermath?
  - b. What parallels do you see between what the disciples experienced and what many of us experienced in the last election?
  - c. The death of Jesus wasn't just a political tragedy for his disciples, it was also personal. What parallels do you see between what the disciples experienced and times in your life when you've experienced bitter personal losses?
4. All the foregoing raises the question: How should we, as followers of Jesus, respond to bitter defeat? For guidance, let's read our scripture passage, as printed on page 3.
  - a. Note the question the angels asked the women in verse 5, "Why do you seek the living among the dead?" What are those words saying to us in our times of bitter defeat? What insights do they offer us in such times?

- b. Note the next statement, “He is not here; he is risen.” What are those words saying to us in our times of bitter defeat? What insights do they offer us?
  - c. Note what the angels also said in Matthew 28:7, “He is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.” What are those words saying to us in our times of bitter defeat? What insights do they offer us?
  - d. In John 11:25, Jesus said, “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, though they die, yet they shall live.” What does that mean?
5. From all the foregoing, we drew the first of seven Biblical promises that we’ll study in the current series. This first promise is perhaps the most important of the seven: ***For followers of Jesus, no defeat is ever final . . . unless we say it is. Like Jesus, we too can rise again from any death or defeat.***
- a. When in your life have you experienced the truth of this promise? What happened?
  - b. How should this promise affect the way we think about the recent election?
6. Virtually every defeat we experience – whether personal or political – has the power to teach us something important which, if internalized, can help us rise again and succeed. For this reason, it’s critical that we ***reflect, listen, learn, and grow*** with each defeat.
- a. Tell us about a key lesson you learned from one of your biggest personal defeats.
  - b. What’s a key lesson you think we should learn from the most recent election?
7. When we experience bitter defeat, we often feel a powerful urge to withdraw and disassociate, but that’s the opposite of what Jesus did and taught. Jesus was all about bold engagement.
- a. See the quotes from Susan David and Frederick Douglas on p. 3. Your thoughts?
  - b. Jeff compared the recent election to what we experienced in 2004 when Bush used opposition to gay equality as a wedge issue and won. Yet within 11 years, marriage equality became a reality. What do you think America will look like 10 years from now? What are the possibilities – positive or negative? What will make the difference?
8. In your personal life right now, what big defeat or threat of defeat are you facing? What would it look like to apply the promise and principles we’ve discussed to your situation? Are you ready to do it?

## **Luke 23:53 - 24:10**

<sup>53</sup>[They took Jesus' body down from the cross], wrapped it in a linen cloth, and laid it in a rock-hewn tomb where no one had ever been laid. <sup>54</sup>It was the day of Preparation, and the Sabbath was beginning. <sup>55</sup>The women who had come with him from Galilee followed, and they saw the tomb and how his body was laid. <sup>56</sup>Then they returned, and prepared spices and ointments. On the Sabbath they rested according to the commandment.

**24**But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. <sup>2</sup>They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, <sup>3</sup>but when they went in, they did not find the body. <sup>4</sup>While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two angels in dazzling clothes stood beside them. <sup>5</sup>The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the angels said to them, 'Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen. <sup>6</sup>Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, <sup>7</sup>that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again.' <sup>8</sup>Then they remembered his words, <sup>9</sup>and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. <sup>10</sup>Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles.

## **Susan David**

"I've had hundreds of people tell me what they don't want to feel. They say things like, 'I don't want to try because I don't want to feel disappointed.' Or, 'I just want this feeling to go away.' I say to them, you have dead people's goals. Only dead people never get stressed, never get broken hearts, never experience the disappointment that comes with failure. Tough emotions are part of our contract with life. You don't get to have a meaningful career or raise a family or leave the world a better place without stress and discomfort. Discomfort is the price of admission to a meaningful life."

## **Frederick Douglas**

"Where there is no struggle, there is no progress."