

**All Saints' Church
Cottenham with Rampton**



**Pastoral Letter #63
4th August 2021**

Dear Church Family,

I read an article last week entitled '*How not to be a sore winner!*' Many of us have experienced the terrifying wrath of a small child not coping with losing at a board game – some of us might have been that small child once! – but most of us grow up to accept that, in every game of winners and losers, we will more often be the loser. That's just how the maths works. Ten children running in a race on school sports day will produce one winner and nine losers. Some avoid this problem by declaring everyone a winner, but that rather defeats the object of having a race and is unfair on the children who excel at sports (not me!).

Given that we spend a lot of our lives *not* coming first, *not* being the best, *not* winning the prize, we learn to be good losers and accept defeat with poise. But do we ever teach ourselves to be good winners too? Maybe something to look out for as you watch the Olympics.

My children used to watch a quiz show in which eliminated contestants had to walk across the studio while the rest placed L-shaped fingers on their foreheads and chanted, '*Loser! Loser!*' I really hated that part as it taught children to be sore winners instead of accepting their good fortune with grace. So, how can we have a godly attitude when we win (occasionally) and when we lose (mostly)?

Let's look at David from the Old Testament. The book of 1 Samuel ends with the death of Saul, and David immediately becomes king. Finally, he had won. His enemy of many years was dead, the throne was his, and David could set to work as God had called him many years before. Surely this, of all moments, was the moment for rejoicing. But, no. The start of 2 Samuel records David's response to the news of his kingship. He laments. And he not only laments the death of his dear friend, Jonathan, but also of Saul, his enemy.

This is a very different reaction from what we often see on our television screens, or hear in the lyrics of songs. How many of us sang along to Abba's '*The winner takes it all/ The loser standing small*'? Or we watch as the cup final champions celebrate with champagne while the runners-up slink home in shame? David's lament in 2 Samuel 1: 17-27 begins with '*How the mighty have fallen!*' It's a phrase we hear today to mock a disgraced politician, but this wasn't how David was using it. He wasn't crowing over Saul's defeat, but recalling the heights he had attained. The emphasis is on the 'mighty' and not the 'fallen' (in battle). This lament treats Saul and Jonathan more like the eliminated couple on 'Strictly Come Dancing', where the losers are not mocked or humiliated, but consoled with lots of hugs and given a final dance amid many fond goodbyes. Surely that's a better model – where we see someone honoured rather than belittled?

When we see someone honoured, either in the world or in the church, we can 'rejoice with those who rejoice', without feeling ourselves diminished in God's eyes – his kingdom is not a competition. When we see someone brought low, we can 'mourn with those who mourn', without thinking ourselves better than they. For there, but by the grace of God, go any one of us.

Jewish folklore recounts a tale in which David's son, Solomon, asks his wise men to create something that will console him in sadness and humble him in pride. They brought him a ring engraved with the words, '*This, too, shall pass.*' In other words, losers will not always be losers, so do not despair. But winners will not always be winners, so do not crow. Perhaps David had that ring too.

Do remember it's the church Afternoon Tea this Sunday from 3pm in the Rectory Garden. If wet, it will be in the Church Hall. If you need a lift, do please let me know.

In September, we are planning to re-launch Little Saints, our Thursday morning group for babies and toddlers with their parent/carer. As this is a group I love to recommend to parents asking for baptism, I'd like it to have a Bible story alongside the usual songs and rhymes, and be a place where families really get to know one another and those leading or helping. Marie, our new Curate, and I are committed to leading Little Saints but we need some helpers who are happy to help set up the space, make tea and toast and chat with the families. If you want to see more young families in the Church, is this something you can commit to? Please get in touch ASAP if you can help in any way.

As the Covid restrictions continue to loosen, both Marie and I are happy to meet folk for coffee and a chat. Just let us know. If you are unable to get to church and would like to receive communion at home, do also let us know. Maggie and Sue, our Authorised Lay Ministers, and Alison, our Lay Reader, would be glad to bring communion to people in their homes.

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all, now and evermore. Amen.

Best wishes,

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