NOT IN IT TO WIN IT

Our churches' decision to suspend in-person gatherings has been met with a variety of reactions, so the time seems right to dive into the central tenets of the historic Christian faith that have informed our response to this situation, and should also inform our lives in general. Warring political factions are not new challenges to Christianity. In fact, Jesus himself resisted the temptation to engage in scorched-earth Culture War politics, choosing instead to confound all the ideological factions of his day by refusing to leverage power and resources for the benefit of the powerful and resourced. What did he focus on instead? Laying aside his own rights in order to sacrifice his life for the same people who persecuted him. The resulting movement changed the world.

Start Talking

1. What seemingly apolitical topic has surprised you the most by becoming suddenly politicized?
2. If you could choose (at work, in relationships, in politics), would you rather (a) always get your way in every situation, but at the cost of your personal relationships, or (b) always concede to someone else's preference for the rest of your life, while maintaining mutual respect? What would be the challenges of living with each option?

Looking Back

1. What did you do this week to show your humanity to the people in your charge? Who did you intentionally make contact with to show you care?
2. When you think about how you've modeled leadership during this season, what has gotten in the way of sharing your humanity with the people around you? What steps did you take in recent days to be more vulnerable moving forward?
3. When did you proactively seek out opportunities to demonstrate humanity in leadership this week?

What About You?

1. When you think of your early experiences with Christianity, what comes to mind? Did you ever get the feeling that the church was at war with other people?
2. When have you found the Christian church more concerned with *winning* than *loving*?
3. Do you feel like you've seen the church expend more energy and effort defending other peoples' rights? Or its own?
4. What are the problems that arise when the Christian church opts to embrace the manipulative tools and strategies employed by the political kingdoms of this world?
5. Why do you think it is so tempting for human beings to ignore Jesus's "law of love" in favor of "crushing" our enemies?

Look It Up

Read the following passage before answering the questions below: Philippians 2:5 – 8. Luke 9:51 – 56.

1. Andy said that this passage from Philippians illustrates the fact that Jesus was playing an entirely different "game" than the people and political factions of ancient Rome and Judea. In your definition, what "game" was Jesus playing?
2. Where do you see evidence of "Jesus taking on the very nature of a servant" in his life and ministry? What "rights" did he give up?
3. What do you think accounts for Jesus's extreme willingness to lose the games of power played by the political kingdoms of his time?
4. In Jesus's economy of love and self-sacrifice, what do you think constitutes a "win?"
5. Jesus spent his life and ministry talking about "the kingdom of Heaven," where the order of things is very different from how things shake out in the kingdoms of Earth. How would you describe the values of the kingdom of Heaven?

Putting It All Together

1. What would it look like to defend someone else's rights instead of your own this week? In what parts of your life can you give up on claiming what you're owed?
2. Can you think of any times in the past when you've opted to focus on winning rather than loving? Are there any steps you can take to rectify the damage that resulted from your actions in those situations?
3. Where can you intentionally "lose" the cutthroat competition of this world in order to win in the sacrificial economy of love that Jesus envisioned this week?
4. What would it take for our church to become known for serving its community, rather than standing up for itself? How can you personally work to make this a reality?

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