

The Tell-Tale Heart

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Those of you who are tennis fans may have caught the little story that took place during the Australian Open last week. American tennis player Tim Smyczek was playing for his life. His tennis life, really. The young man from Milwaukee is ranked 112th in the world and was up against perhaps the greatest tennis player in the world Rafael Nadal. Young Smyczek played the match of his life taking the tennis giant to five sets and one game away from winning the tennis match of his life. With everything on the line and Nadal serving in the final game – a spectator shouted in the middle of the Nadal's serve disrupting his rhythm and sending the serve out. An unfortunate turn for the champion which could very well have sent the match against him. But Smyczek, the underdog, under no obligation from the rules and at great risk of giving away the moment of his life – held up two fingers to the judge – which was the signal to give the champion the serve back. Request granted. Nadal served, won the point and two points later won the match and sent the young American home – nary a footnote in tennis history.

In the wake of deflategate – this silly story of who was responsible for the deflated footballs in the game two Sundays ago that sent the Patriots to the Super Bowl – it's good to be reminded in the wake of the our annual lust to crown the Super Bowl Champions there are still some quiet and heroic gestures of fairness in the world.

Smyczek's story reminded me of the 1964 two man Italian bobsled team in the Innsbruck 1964 Olympics who had just finished their second run in record time putting themselves for the moment in first place before the last run. Up on top of the hill the British team was preparing for their final run

when it was discovered that the axle bolt to their sled has snapped off rendering it impossible to go down the mountain. When news came to the bottom of the mountain to Eugenio Monti, the Italian captain, that the Brits had this terribly unfortunate circumstance, Monti went to his sled detached his axle bolt and sent it up to the Brits to fix their sled. The Brits had an incredible final run and won the gold medal.

Stories like these are obvious examples of great sportsmanship but they are also stories that tell the tale of the heart. There is nothing like a public moment when so much of who you are and so much of what you want for yourself is set up against so much of who you are and so much of what you want for yourself. Who wouldn't want the gold medal and who wouldn't want to be the greatest in the land? Why we would give almost anything perhaps, even our souls. Times such as these when just a turn of the head or a shrug of the shoulders would get you the trophy -- require a person to locate the heart. Who am I really? What do I really want out of this life? What am I really called to do? Stories that tell the tale of the heart.

Years ago I had the chance to walk the floor of the New York Stock Exchange with a friend of mine who was a trader on the floor. We've all seen pictures of the floor of the New York Stock Exchange -- a pretty chaotic place with hundreds of people placing trades. At one point as we were moving from one part of the floor to the next my friend was pulled aside by another trader. For the next 90 seconds outside of my hearing there ensued a rather intense exchange between the two. When my friend returned he was silent for several minutes as we continued to walk and then he proceeded to tell me what had just happened -- that his fellow trader was trying to convince him to do something just a little bit illegal. Not much and likely never to be discovered. But wrong nevertheless. He had declined. He said, "I get those kinds of offers about once a week. And every week it gives me the chance to check again my soul."

It is the soul that Jesus turns to again and again in his Sermon on the Mount. Verse after verse, it seems Jesus points us to all these moments in your life and mine that tell the tale of our hearts. Our souls. The Sermon on the Mount is this great cardiac exam. Let's talk, Jesus says, about your heart.

- If you're letting yourself get angry to the point of calling someone a fool – well then that is a tale of the heart.
- If you find your attention drawn to someone outside of your marriage – that is a tale of the heart.
- If you find yourself harboring a grudge against an enemy – that is a tale of the heart.
- If you are more interested in people seeing how good you are – that is a tale of your heart.
- If you are having trouble forgiving someone – that is a tale of the heart.
- If you are trying to serve two masters – that is a tale of the heart.

Likewise, Jesus says, when it comes to the challenge and blessing of treasure – financial treasure – no surprise ... it is a story that tells the tale of the heart. Do not store up for yourself treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume. But store up for yourself treasures in heaven where moth and rust do not consume. Where your treasure is there will your heart be also.

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Now the big mistake you and I make when it comes to this teaching of Jesus - where your treasure is there will your heart be also - is that we go only as far with this teaching as to make us feel guilty. There are treasures on earth and treasures in heaven – and it seems like I got more treasures on earth than I do in heaven – so I'm a bad person and I hope God forgives me. That's what we let this teaching do to us. But that's not the point. Jesus doesn't come to make us guilty – Jesus comes to wonder with us where we want our hearts to be. Jesus comes to help us check our souls. Where is your heart taking you and is that where you want it to be? When push comes to shove where do you want your heart beating most?

A friend of mine tells the story of his lusting after the latest version of a BMW motorcycle. I don't know enough about motorcycles to describe one of these bikes, but he tells of making the decision to buy the model about which he had been lusting for years. And he tells of feeling his heart pound as he signed the papers, started the engine and drove off the lot. Pounding with joy. He

drives it into the garage. Goes into the house and on the kitchen table is the mail. And in the mail is the brand new BMW catalogue for the next year's model. And as my friend describes feeling his heart slow to almost a stop. Long before RUST and MOTH consume - he had already lost his heart.

So Jesus wonders with us - where do we want our hearts beating most. In other words - with whom do we wish to have a love affair? In particular, Jesus wonders about the love affair we might have with our Father in heaven. It's not that we shouldn't enjoy the things of the earth in some sort of moderation - but Jesus is interested in this love affair with the Father. What might it mean that with each passing day and week and year our hearts would grow larger for God? What would happen if this heart inside of us grew larger and larger those things that God seems most concerned about? That we could grow to become unashamed fans of God. "Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." That's the start of fandom. What if we became these outrageous fans for the kingdom of God? That despite whatever pressures we might feel to be something or someone else - give away our souls - we would have this strong and beating heart for the Father. That whatever we might do in public or private - we would wish to please the Father. God doesn't want to guilt us into giving - he wants to grow us into giving.

So most of you know I am a Michigan fan. Yes, I know it's not the best of years to admit you're a Michigan man, but I am. And let's imagine something that appears more and more unimaginable - and that is that the Michigan football team is playing for the National Championship (I think Jesus will come back before this happens, but suspend disbelief and imagine it happening) - and the game is sold out and I get a call from a friend who has a ticket for me - and it only costs \$1000. Now any motivation I might have to pay that \$1000 will come not because of guilt. You can't guilt me to pay that money for a dumb football game. No, the only motivation comes from my fandom. It comes from my heart. The heart gets us to do some crazy things. The heart gives the serve back to the champion. The heart sends the bolt up the mountain. The heart says no to a shady deal. The

heart writes a crazy number on a check and pledge card. The heart gets us to do some crazy things. And the crazy things have everything to do with who we are rooting for.

It makes me think of the high school football game my brother was playing in. I was up in the stands watching with my mother and my father was down on the sidelines watching the game from up close. And then it happened. My brother intercepted the football and had in front of him a clear 50 yard path to the end zone. So off he sprinted – and the only thing I can remember about that moment was not watching my brother running to the end zone, but watching my father – in the suit and tie of the supposed respected pastor, rain coat flapping in the air, cheering at the top of his voice – my father with no thought to anything else but his boy, running down the sidelines with him.

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And so we bring our hearts to the table – at least this is God's invitation. Bring your hearts. See what love the Father has for us that we should be called children of God. God is our biggest fan. And he gives us the honor to cheer him back. To cheer him back. To love him with all our hearts, all our minds, all our soul, and all our strength. For this, Jesus says, is what life is all about. These pounding hearts for God.

For where your heart is – there will your treasure be also.

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. And because we are such fans -- Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done. On earth as it is in heaven.