



## Thoughts on the Journey

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There are defining moments from my childhood and adolescence that punctuate the word 'fear' for me. They include coming home with anything less than a 'B' on my report card, getting caught wearing shoes other than my corrective shoes, and probably the worst was playing sports and having to go through that whole selective process of other people deciding on which team I would play. For anyone who has had the experience of repeatedly being chosen last for any sports team, you can probably commiserate with the dread. Everyone knew who the athletic kids were and everyone wanted them on their team. By the same token, everyone knew who the less athletically gifted kids were and the better teams would steer clear of them; I fell into the latter category and I reveled when I wasn't the very last to be chosen.

In high school, gym was part of the regular curriculum. I don't know what was worse, the ridiculous gym uniforms we had to wear (even thin girls looked bad in them), or Sally Walker, our gym instructor. She was a no nonsense woman who was probably born sporting athletic arms and legs who, no doubt, skipped the whole crawling phase as a baby and went straight to running. Mrs. Walker treasured the athletic kids and tortured the rest of us with a determination to whip us into shape. In her class, SHE chose the sides.

Looking back, I think I had many fears about sports because I told myself repeatedly, "it's not my gift." I feared being inadequate, I feared looking bad in comparison to others, I feared letting my team down.

One day, Mrs. Walker pulled me aside and said, "In order for you to help your team win, you need to quit thinking about yourself and stay focused on getting the ball to the other end of that court and in to that basket." She pointed at the basket with her right arm, but her eyes were set clearly on mine; I knew she meant business. I also knew the rules of the game and I knew the goal. In order to be on the winning team, I had to change my mindset, step out of the box I had put myself in, and be willing to stay focused. It took awhile and a lot of yelling on Sally Walker's part, but I finally managed to become a contributing member of the team. The more I took responsibility for my role on the team, the better I performed. Not only did Sally's words help to bear fruit for my sport's team, but later for my spiritual life as well.

In Matthew's gospel, Jesus said to his disciples:

**"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit upon his glorious throne, and all the nations will be assembled before him. And he will separate them one from another, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will place the sheep on his right and the goats on his left."**

Jesus continued to explain the difference between the sheep and the goats, those who will inherit the kingdom and those who will not. It is not only what we do for the least of God's people, but also what we don't do that separates the righteous from the damned. Jesus clearly told his disciples, as he tells us today, feed the hungry, give drink to those who thirst, clothe the naked, visit the ill and imprisoned. Jesus not only makes the point that when you do these things for the least of his people, you do these things for Christ himself and when you fail to do these things for the least of God's people, you also fail to do these things for Christ.

It is far more comfortable to think of God as a merciful God with no consequences for our actions or lack of action. Throughout God's history with his people, he has shown time and time again that he is a merciful compassionate God. But Jesus, to his disciples, makes judgement a very real part of the equation. He makes a clear distinction between those who will reap eternal paradise and those who will reap eternal punishment.

There is an expectation when being a member of a team, a family, or any other group working for the common good; that expectation is that we contribute. Being members of the Body of Christ, there is also an expectation that we are more than passive observers in our life of faith. We are called to participate in the mission of salvation. It requires that we let go of our fears, that we take the focus off ourselves and be mindful of others and their needs, that we trust the Holy Spirit will help us find our gifts and use them, that we fix our gaze on Jesus Christ and the example he set for us. Just like my high school sports experience, it is sometimes easier to use excuses why we can't do something. Jesus, like my coach, points to the goal at the end of life's court telling us what we need to do to attain heaven. It's not only what we do, but what we don't do that makes the difference between life and death.