**The Attraction of Christ**

**FBC Albemarle**

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The University of Connecticut women’s basketball team accomplished a feat never done in any major sport, men or women. They are on a 101 game winning streak, many of those wins coming by wide margins. Matter of fact, more than half of the wins during the streak came by margins of 40 or more points. In a sport where there are scholarship limits and the highest level of talent in women’s basketball history spread throughout the college basketball programs, it is hard to imagine that a program could sustain the level of success that it has accomplished over the last several years. To say the UConn women’s basketball team has been dominant could be the greatest understatement in sports.

As I have been following the coverage of the historic winning streak, I’ve listened to former Connecticut players recount why they believe Coach Geno Auriemma has been so successful in leading the UConn program. Every player interviewed had similar stories of how difficult the practices were physically, mentally and emotionally. Coach Auriemma understands how to push good players to become great players. He knows how to push the ladies to their limits and even beyond what they could imagine. Each player talked about how they wanted to transfer after the first or second year because of the coach’s demand for excellence. Yet, most stayed because they recognized that as they matured, they saw how Coach Auriemma could bring the very best out of them.

In high school, I had a similar experience. Until my junior year in high school, I didn’t have to put a whole lot of effort in classes. That all changed when I walked into my AP U.S. History class with Mrs. Cope. Her level of expectation was entirely on another level. The amount of reading was immense. The weekly research paper was over the top. The take-home, open-book, open-notes, open-collaboration test sounded good on the surface but it pushed my classmates and me to the brink of madness. After I received the failing grade in my first research paper, I wanted to quit. I was not used to failing. I wanted to drop AP U.S. History and take a regular history class with a sane teacher who understood what it meant to be a high school student with six other classes.

I didn’t quit. I got mad; somewhat towards Mrs. Cope who was insane to expect Ph.D. level of work from juniors in high school but mostly at myself. I worked harder than I had ever worked in my short academic career. I wanted to show Mrs. Cope that I could raise my game and meet her expectations. By the end of my junior year, I not only got an A in her class and passed my AP exam for college credit but she became one of my favorite teachers in high school. She was the first to expect more from me than I expected from myself.

In the first part of John 6, we have the story of the feeding of the five thousand. Following this miracle, the people were ready to crown Jesus as the king. They figured that if they had a king who could feed five thousand people with just a couple of loaves of bread and a few fish, than they wouldn’t have a need that would not be met. So there were huge crowds of “disciples” that were following him from town to town.

Jesus realized that the time had come when there had to be a sifting of his followers. So he began to teach them about the spiritual nature of his mission and emphasizing the spiritual demands of being his disciples. Jesus claimed that he was the bread of life from heaven and that those who eat of it will never die. “Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life…” (v. 54)

Of course, this type of talk was difficult for his Jewish followers. Throughout their life, they have been taught the Jewish kosher laws that forbade them to eat any meat that had blood remaining or drink the blood of any source. What was Jesus talking about? How can he teach that anyone who would eat of his flesh and drink of his blood would live in eternity? What does that mean? Has the rabbi lost his mind? Does he expect his followers to be cannibals?

Verse 66 said, “because of this many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him.” When the expectation was raised; when the teachings got a little harder; when following Jesus meant that they had to change their way of thinking; when following Jesus didn’t mean that they were always going to get a free meal, many turned around and went back home because things got too hard.

Then Jesus turned to his original twelve and asked, “Do you also wish to leave? I imagine the disciples looked around to each other, considered the cost and motioned for Peter to speak for the group. “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.”

Just as the disciples did when Jesus asked them the question, most of us have come to realize that being a follower of Jesus is the answer to all of our questions. Jesus was pretty clear about the cost of discipleship. It was Jesus who taught that the first will be last and the last will be first. (Matt. 20:16) He told his disciples that they must deny themselves and pick up the cross daily and follow him. (Luke 9:23) Paul understood the cost of discipleship but more than that, what we gain as followers of Jesus. “But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ.” (Phil. 3:7-8)

So we ask ourselves, “To whom shall we go?” To whom shall we go with the burden of sin and guilt? The Bible says that every one of us has gone astray, like a sheep wandering from his shepherd (Isa. 53:6). So on our own, we have no access to God. And there is nothing that we—fallen humans—can do to rectify the situation. That’s why sin and guilt are burdensome. Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth and the life.” (John 14:6) We can come to Jesus and unload our burden of sin because God loved us so much that he sent us Jesus, that if we would place our faith and trust in him, we will have eternal life. (John 3:16)

Our sin and guilt are problems we cannot solve on our own. Some try to solve it through alcohol and drugs. Others turn to relationships. Some bury themselves in their work thinking that it would provide the safety and security, yet it fails miserably. The only way to let go of our sins and guilt is to place it at the feet of Jesus and allow his gift of salvation to take its place. The good news is that we don’t have to earn it or beg for it. God’s forgiveness and love are given freely and extravagantly.

The second question is to whom shall we go with the troubles and sorrows? Again, the only person to turn to is Jesus. Jesus offers us a yoke that is light. Jesus wants to be our rock and our strength. Jesus desires to give us the peace that passes all understanding. Jesus provides rest for the weary. When we are overwhelmed with life, Jesus wants to carry us through the difficult days.

When we are going through difficult times, it is hard to see God at work. It is hard to see how God is working when someone you love passes away. It is hard to see God’s hand in a cancer diagnosis. It is hard to believe that God is there in the darkness of betrayal. Yet, we hold on to the promise of Jesus; “In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33)

Lastly, to whom shall we go with our lives? We all have one life to live. We will all face death one day unless Jesus comes back before our hour. With the life that we have remaining, what are we going to do with it? The mission of Jesus that was left to his disciples was to love God, love others and make disciples. No matter what stage of life we are in, our mission as Christians has not changed. As we go to school, we are to share the light of Jesus. While we are at work, we are to be an example of Jesus. While we are at the grocery store, we are called to love like Jesus. While we are in a restaurant, we are to treat others like we want to be treated. While we are retired, we are to spend our time building up God’s kingdom. Even when we are physically unable to do as much as we used to do, we can encourage others, share the wisdom of past lessons learned and pray for those who are in need. Everyone has a part to play and everyone is needed in the body of Christ.

To whom shall we go? There is no one like Jesus. He is the bread of life. He is the drink that fills our cup. He is the one who sacrificed himself for our sins and failures. He is the one who carries us when we feel like we can’t go on. He is the one who gives us purpose in life. Jesus is attractive because he is love. May we always go to Jesus who is the Giver of life and life everlasting.