

The Highest Highs and Lowest Lows

The NCAA basketball tournament is a roller coaster ride for players and fans. Basketball fans have their favorite basketball teams so emotions start on Selection Sunday, as teams are chosen and seeded for the tournament. Once the tournament pairings are set up many people fill out their brackets, so now everyone has a stake in the results of *every* game. Then play begins. This year, the biggest upset of all-time happened in the first round. The #1 nationally ranked Virginia Cavaliers lost to a #16 seed, the first time this has ever happened in the history of the tournament. It was not a narrow defeat but a convincing, 20-point shellacking.



Can you imagine the emotions for the Virginia fans? Their team had the best record in college basketball so expectations were sky high. Many predicted them to win the national championship. On the other hand, can you visualize the euphoria of fans from little known

UMBC? Many people didn't even know that stands for the University of Maryland – Baltimore County. UMBC wasn't even on most people's radar prior to the tournament. They are nicknamed the Retrievers -- not much of a powerhouse name, but a giant slayer, nevertheless. The Retrievers went from a mountaintop experience of an unexpected, unprecedented win to a heartbreaking loss in their next game. From time to time we have all had our "bubble burst," not just in sports but in life.

We are entering into Holy Week. On Palm Sunday we celebrate Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem. Crowds waved palm branches and chanted "Hosanna." Expectations were high. The people wanted a savior – not to free their souls, but to free them from Roman oppression. To them, Jesus was the mountain top – all powerful, able to heal the sick and lame, and the ability to perform miracles. There was nothing Jesus couldn't do. But, what the people wanted was not going to happen. For Jesus, it was a humble donkey ride to his ultimate mission. We know in hindsight that everything happened according to God's plan, but for those living through it, the week had its ups and downs.

How the week unfolded was anything but euphoric.

- On Monday Jesus went into the temple and angrily turned over the tables of people seeking to turn a place of worship into a market. That didn't make Jesus very popular. (Matthew 21:12-13).
- On Tuesday the elders and high priests challenged Jesus' authority (Matthew 21:23-27).
- In response, Jesus told three parables (listed below) which clearly showed the bad intentions of the high priests and Pharisees. They realized that his message targeted them. The truth that Jesus spoke put him at odds with the spiritual leaders of the community.
- As a result, they plotted to kill him. They tried to trap him in His own words. Remember Jesus' answer regarding the image of Caesar on the coin. *So give back to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's* (Matthew 22:21).

The week did not seem to be going well for Jesus.

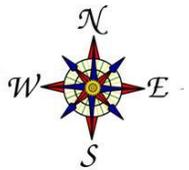
- By Wednesday Jesus warned his disciples that the Passover was just two days away and that He would be crucified (Matthew 26:1-5).
- That same day Judas Iscariot made his deal to betray his master for 30 pieces of silver (Luke 22:3-6).
- On Thursday morning Jesus sent his disciples into the city to find the man whose home would be the location for the Passover meal, which we know as the Last Supper (Matthew 26:17-18).
- That evening, in The Upper Room, Jesus shared a meal with the disciples and then blessed and distributed the bread and wine (Matthew 26:26-27).
- Later that evening Jesus and His disciples went to the Garden of Gethsemane, where He was betrayed by Judas and arrested (Matthew 26:47-49).
- By early Friday morning Jesus would face the first of six trials, initially appearing before Annas (according to the Gospel of John), and then to Caiaphas. Later Jesus appeared before the Sanhedrin (the governing council) and eventually Pilate, Herod and then Pilate again.
- During the course of these trials Peter, his closest disciple, denied Him three times (Matthew 26:69-70).
- The crowd who had cheered on his triumphal entry into Jerusalem just six days earlier turned on Him, and demanded that Pilate crucify him (Luke 23:21).
- Jesus was mocked, beaten and crowned with thorns (Matthew 26:67-68).
- He would carry his own cross outside the city gates and be put to death in the most cruel, inhumane way (Matthew 27:32).

- He was buried in a tomb at sundown (Matthew 27:57-60).
- Realizing what he had done in betraying His master, Judas returned the 30 pieces of silver and hung himself in despair (Matthew 27:5).
- On Saturday, Pilate placed a guard outside the tomb and had it sealed with a large stone. The Chief Priests and Pharisees remembered that Jesus said He would rise from the dead on the 3rd day, so Pilate sent a guard (Matthew 27:62-66).

Whew! All these events happened in just one week's time. We sometimes forget the flurry of events between Palm Sunday and the Last Supper and finally, the crucifixion on Good Friday.

So, how do you live your life during chaotic and times of stress? How do you mitigate the highs and lows of your life? Do you bring God into the picture during both of these times, and the times in between? Jesus handled all this with class, grace and conviction. He knew where He was going! He knew His mission in life!

- Do you know where you are going?
- Do you understand that God will bring you through the tough situations of your life?
- Can you be "one with the Father," trusting Him during the highs and especially the lows of your life?



Know that God will be with you. That should give you confidence even when things are going badly. Our world is in chaos, with plenty of highs and lows. Evil makes it into a discouraging mess and at times it seems like the bad guys might win. But, we know that God wins in the end. His plan is for you to win also. Ride out the tough times because Easter is coming and with it, hope fulfilled. The triumph won't be a temporary high but a glorious eternal victory.

Prayer: Most gracious Heavenly Father. Our life is full of highs, lows, surprises and disappointments. You are with us throughout it all. When things are going well we pray we will give thanks to You and in tough times, we ask You to give us strength. Amen.

Reference:

Parable of the Two Sons – Matthew 21:28-32

Parable of the Tenants – Matthew 21:33-45

Parable of the Wedding Banquet – Matthew 22:1-14