

A Shift in the Wind

“Be real. Relax. Give other people a break.”

Acts 2:14-21

Last in the series: Blown Away (The Holy Spirit and the way things ought to be)

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On Steroids

Laura and I had been in the doctor's office several hours and finally returned to the waiting room. The big flat screen TV showed a scene from Washington in the chambers of Congress. A guy I was used to seeing in a baseball uniform was dressed in a suit and tie, sitting at the long table answering questions of the congressional committee. It was “the Rocket” Roger Clemens, telling them he had not had taken HGH or steroids while playing major league baseball.¹ I looked at Laura, who had just undergone her latest infusion, and said, “You'd better not play professional sports for a while.”

I don't know if Clemens was lying or telling the truth. Since then he's been indicted by a federal grand jury on six felony counts involving perjury, false statements and obstruction of congress. His trial is supposed to begin next month; who knows how it's going to turn out.

Either way, it's a sad story for one of the great athletes of our time. Though he could be impolite to sports journalists and severe with others, he spent 23 years in the majors; was one of only four pitchers to strike out over 4,000 batters in a career; had over 300 wins; and was a seven-time Cy Young Award winner.²

Add to Clemens: baseball slugger Barry Bonds, the runner Marion Jones, bicyclist Lance Armstrong, home run champ Mark McGuire, Olympians, professionals, collegians, high-schoolers: why is it that we keep hearing of these allegations and that they seemed to be attached to the best of the best?

Off Steroids

It's not much different than those who cheat on tests or falsify their job resumes.

Even in everyday life among everyday people: people deny they said something when they did; and they're apt to say they are something when they aren't; or they're inclined to say they did something when they didn't. And have you noticed? Some of them can also be incredibly hard on other people. You get to wonder what it is in our

world that will, sooner or later, corner *you* and get *you* to be like that. Maybe once or twice it already has.

A member of a church in Kalamazoo once described what work life was like with him. He was a salesman for a pharmaceutical company distributing infant formula to hospitals. He said that his main competitor – a sales rep from a competing company – consistently falsified his information to win the account. This is what he had to compete with. He had this constant pressure to also misrepresent the truth or else he might lose the sale and maybe his job. But he wouldn't do it because he took his faith seriously and believed that being honest and gracious was more important than success.

Pressure: like if you were a top-level athlete and you knew your opponent was going to take a drug that would give him or her the edge and maybe not get caught; so if you're going to have your chance to win, you'd better take the drug too.

You're pressured to become something you're not in order to be what you think you have to be.

Have you ever faced that kind of pressure? Have you ever had to make that kind of decision?

This is nothing new. Biochemical technology might be more advanced, but it was the way the world was when Jesus lived and when Christianity had just begun.

The writer of this letter to the church in ancient Ephesus understood.

Each of you put off falsehood and speak the truth...don't let the sun go down on your anger...

In other words, he's saying that in this new age, when the Spirit of the living Christ has taken up residence among us, you can be real and relax. Be who you are and celebrate others as they are.

Be real. Relax. Give other people a break.

This is a marked contrast to the way we're taught to think and act. In this new time when the Spirit of the Living Christ is among us you don't need to hide your failures and you don't have to win at any cost. Jesus connects you to God. In that connection you've already won the victory that really counts.

You know that everything in Jesus is about this different way of authenticity.

One day he was teaching his disciples and some important people when it started getting noisy. Mothers had come with their children who were probably just being kids. I can picture Jesus and the serious men sitting under a tree discussing theology with the children running, chasing each other around with their high-pitched giggles and excited shouts.

His disciples were trying to be responsible. That's all. They had the best intentions to make the place good for teaching and learning and the kids were getting in the way. And after all, it was everybody's opinion that children were not really that important. They were needy and without power. They didn't have anything to offer. They were expendable. In fact, they were the very picture of everybody in that society who were weak and needy and had nothing to give.

They were the meek.

So the disciples started to scold the children and scold the mothers and told them to go away.

That's when Jesus scolded his disciples for scolding the kids. It was a teaching moment for a more profound lesson than the men could have had if Jesus had stayed with the lesson plan.

"Let the children come to me!" he said. "Don't turn them away. The Kingdom of God belongs to them. If you want to be connected to God, you've got to become like them!"

Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

I wonder if the disciples and the other guys understood.

I wonder if they suddenly jumped to their feet to play a game of tag.

From winning at all costs and deception and severe criticism of others to being real and relaxing and giving others a break: Jesus' Way is so opposite to the way most of the world functions. Jesus introduced a real shift.

The writer of Ephesians says that we should imitate God – walk in the way of love. Jesus shows us *that way*.

This is so much a shift from business as usual that it's really subversive. It changes the way you live in every way. It doesn't mean that you stop trying to excel; but it does mean that your reason for excelling is completely different.

No longer is it to crush your competition and look invincible at any cost.

One of the most fascinating sports figures of modern times was a Scottish runner who competed back in the '20s. He was so fast he was a shoe-in to run for the United Kingdom in the 1924 Olympics. Eric Liddell ran simply because by running fast he felt it brought God joy. It was for him a celebration of life and the joy of exercising the gift God gave him.

That was it.

So when he entered the Olympics the schedule came out that he would have to run the 100 meter sprint, his best race, on a Sunday – he refused to run. Breaking the Sabbath would have been compromising his commitment to God. It would have weakened his connection.

The way the movie, *Chariots of Fire*, tells the story, even the Crown Prince ordered him to run, but he refused. That made it a scandal. Liddell chose God over the King. And he held firm.

Winning a race under those conditions *would not be him*. He would lose his integrity.

Instead, he ran the 400 meter, which was scheduled on a different day. That's when he ran like the wind and happened to win the gold.³

No steroids. Only the gift he was given. He was authentic. He was who he was. And he used his gift to honor God.

Different.

You don't have to be in sports or competitive business for this to apply. No matter what your life is like:

In Jesus you can be real. Relax. Give other people a break.

On the Spirit

At our daughter's high school graduation the students sat on the football field as we took in the commencement program from the crowd in the stands. It was a hot and balmy day when what wind there was just seemed to drain the life right out of you. Speakers spoke. The orchestra played. I was trying to pay attention when my father whispered to me and pointed at the two flags flying on opposite ends of the field. One was unfurled in one direction, the other flew the opposite way. "That means something," he said. "Something is going to happen."

And it did. That night a storm was upon us with 100 mile-an-hour straight-line winds. Exploding bursts of energy sent pockets of trees down in spiraling patterns. Roofs blew off homes and businesses. The weather changed from hot and balmy to cool and dry.

There was a shift in the wind and it brought forth change.

That's the kind of thing we believe happened in the upper room the day the Holy Spirit came. The church was born with the life of Jesus setting it afire. The story goes that it came with the rush of a mighty, thundrous wind.

A wind shift.

Let there be no doubt. They were subversive. They would take the Way of Jesus and practice it, live it, and challenge the world to do the same. And as they did they changed the world, considerably.

That's what it means to be the church in the power of the Holy Spirit. And if we're serious enough about it, we might change the world, too. No more need for steroids.

It's a shift in the wind.

So be real. Relax. And give other people a break.

¹ "Roger Clemens" Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roger_Clemens#Accusations_of_steroids_use last updated June 19, 2011. © Wikipedia.

² Ibid.

³ "Eric Liddell" *Wikipedia*, the free encyclopedia. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eric_Liddell.