

MARK'S REMARKS

The Colts competed against the Bengals in football a couple of weeks ago. Having an eleven year connection with a player on the Bengals, I was privileged to have a front row seat near mid-field where I could clearly hear the shouts of battle and the barking of plays. This vantage point also provided an unobstructed view of high-fives, slaps on the back, and rainbow-like spiral passes, which quite surprisingly often found their targets. The battle was fought hard on both sides with the Bengals exiting the field victorious.

Unfortunately, my “top dollar seat” also offered me the displeasure of hearing and seeing a few individuals display a character consisting of swearing, disrespectful anger, and cheating. What made this truly disturbing? I was witnessing a game of community flag football played by 5th and 6th grade children.

One child had tied a knot in his belt to keep the opponents from pulling his flag. He denied it until the referee pointed out the obvious. At one point, a coach harshly responded to a child who mentioned it was 3rd and 15, “*It’s 2nd down! What, are you still in 2nd grade since you can’t count?*” Occasionally, the Lord’s name was called upon. For one player, it was a reaction of anger, for me it was a request of aid. The hour was painfully distressing.

This scene was sharply contrasted a few days later. The RVCS kitchen staff was ~~playing~~ serving the RVCS students. In celebration of an eleven year connection with a student, I was privileged to have a front row seat in the service line directly behind the chocolate chip cookies. This vantage point provided an unobstructed view of smiles and acts of kindness. Fortunately my “top dollar seat” also offered me the pleasure of clearly hearing “Thank you,” “Yes please,” “No thank you,” “May I have two (cookies, of course) please?” The serving was faithful and unselfish and both students and cooks exited the lunch hour victorious. The hour was pleurably harmonious.

I do not know the players and the coach that communicated the overflow of evil in their hearts, as Jesus says in Luke 6. I do know the “players” that communicated the overflow of good stored in their hearts. Regardless, both contributed to creating a contrasting landscape. Harshness distinguished from gentleness, spitefulness from kindness, selfishness from service. The mental picture remains and while actions contributed to some of the scenery, most of the canvas was painted because of words.

On an autumn Saturday I was knocked down a bit by the words of others, wondering what the display before me spoke of homes, parents, coaches, and values. Was this “football field behavior” distinct from their typical behavior? Unfortunately, there is not to be such a division in our lives. “***Whatever*** you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus” (Colossians 3:17)

Yet on an autumn Monday, I was built up by the words of others. Rejoicing in the politeness and the unity all around me, I found myself once again calling upon the name of the Lord. However, this was in thanks along with a request that these children would refuse such a division in their lives, taking the character displayed before me into the world that lay beyond the school doors. Today, I am confident in all that is done and said God will have the last word.

“Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen” (Ephesians 4:29)

Encouraged,

Pastor Mark