

What do Gold Medal Hockey, Prayer and Mothers Have in Common?

Can you remember where you were when Sydney Crosby scored his Olympic Gold Medal winning goal 7 minutes and 40 seconds into overtime? I watched these events unfold at the Grande Prairie airport and then in the air on a Westjet flight from Grande Prairie to Edmonton. I was in Grande Prairie that weekend on denominational business and was returning to Kelowna. I was dressed in a black suit and clergy shirt; and easily identified as a man of the cloth. When I got to the departure gate, I saw that every pair of eyes in the place was glued to one of flat screened TVs strategically located around the departure area. The second period of the Gold Medal men's hockey game was underway. I learned that Canada had scored two unanswered goals before I started watching. I found a seat near a flat screen, settled down and started watching the game.

Just as I got into the game, passengers on another flight were called to a gate for boarding. A man and his friend answered the boarding call and walked right by me. They stopped for a second, smiled, and one said, "Say a prayer for the boys Padre, they need all the help they can get. We have to win this one." I smiled and said I would. I remember praying in my mind, "Lord I don't know if this man was serious or not, but I want to add my prayers for Team Canada." A short time later, at 12:44 into the second period, Ryan Kessler of Team USA scored a goal and shrunk Canada's lead to one goal. My heart sunk. "Lord," I thought, "The man asked for Your help keeping the lead! He made an appeal to You through me. What is he thinking about You now?"

When Zach Parise of Team USA scored the second goal in the final seconds of regulation play, my heart sank even further. Team USA had just snatched a victory from the jaws of defeat. The winning spirit of Team USA was resurrected before our eyes. Team Canada was instantaneously demoralized. Team USA would be unstoppable in overtime. I said to God: "How is that man going to take this? I hope he is a man of faith. Then he will understand the game ending was Your will and will take it in stride. However, what if this man had a weak faith, or had no faith at all; yet, at this moment, felt compelled to reach out to You. What if he felt that he could not ask You for help himself because he felt unworthy and he asked me to pray to You for him? How is this man and his friend going to take Your answer to his prayer?"

God answered our prayers in a way that no one would have expected. I, like my fellow passengers, saw the game-winning goal while in the air on the tiny screen on the seat in front of us. When the game winning goal was scored, everyone on the flight broke into cheers. Because of the 2010 Games and this game in particular, something new was born in all Canadians: national pride and patriotism at a level not seen for decades.

The same thing happened to the disciples on the first Easter Sunday. Jesus promised them that the Kingdom of God was coming. He had healed the sick, calmed storms, drove out demons, raised the dead and preached with power. He had promised the resurrection of the dead, the establishment of a new kingdom, a new heaven and a new earth. Roman and Jewish authorities could not touch Jesus. When asked to teach the disciples to pray, he taught them the prayer we have come to call the Lord's Prayer. Jesus encouraged them to pray, "Our Father who art in heaven Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." On the first Palm Sunday, Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey and the crowd greeted him with cheers: "Hosanna to the Son of David!" "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" It looked as if Jesus was riding into Jerusalem to establish the Kingdom of God with power and might. Instead, on the first Maundy Thursday evening, He was arrested and tried by Jewish authorities. He was convicted by them of Blasphemy (for admitting He was God's Son) and sentenced to

death. Unable to carry out the sentence, they sent him to be tried by the Roman authorities on the first Good Friday. Jesus was ultimately convicted by the Romans and sentenced to crucifixion. He died that day.

At first it appeared that the Jewish, Roman authorities and the Devil would lose out but they pulled a victory from the jaws of defeat. The disciples had prayed for the kingdom of God to come. Jesus did not bring the kingdom in the way they expected; He had died at the hands of his enemies. How were Jesus' disciples to take this answer to their prayer? Then, on the first Easter Sunday, God snatched victory from the jaws of defeat. God resurrected Jesus from the dead. The resurrected Jesus appeared to His disciples, changing them and all of history. With God's help, Jesus' presence, and the power of the Holy Spirit, new faith and hope were resurrected in the disciples and they carried Christianity to the world.

I am reminded that mothers have experiences similar to those of the disciples and Team Canada's fans. Mothers cannot live their loved one's lives. They must sit on the sidelines and cheer them on and most importantly, pray for them. They pray that God gives their loved ones all they need to succeed, to score goals and win in the game of life. However, very often mothers' prayers seem to go unanswered or worse. Sometimes it seems that defeat is snatched from the jaws of victory and a child or grandchild's life situation gets much worse. Yet God urges all mothers to hold on and keep praying and wait for Him to act. Sometimes a mother and/or grandmother is privileged; they see the gold medal goal scored in overtime. Their child or grandchild is changed and new hope and a new life are resurrected. They are able to see a child or grandchild experience healing, land a job, graduate from school, pass exams, overcome addictions, reconcile with a spouse or other loved one, give birth to a child, and come to faith.

As Mother's Day approaches on May 9th, I want to take this opportunity to thank all mothers for their prayers for their children and grandchildren. I want to thank God for answering mothers' prayers. Thank you, God, for permitting those gold medal winning goals in overtime and snatching victory from the jaws of defeat. To mothers who have not seen the game-winning goal, I want to encourage you to keep on praying and believing that God will answer your prayers; just wait and watch.

I want to encourage all of you to thank God and pray for your mothers this Mothers' Day. Pray that God will give mothers the opportunity to experience gold medal goals scored in overtime and experience victory snatched from the jaws of defeat. My family recently prayed for our matriarch. We prayed that tumours discovered in her body would be benign. Our prayer was not answered; they were malignant. She needs treatment and healing. We continue to pray and wait for God to use doctors, nurses, chemotherapy and surgery to score a gold medal winning goal in overtime and snatch victory from the jaws of defeat.

It is my prayer that each person reading this article will attend a worship service this Mothers' Day and thank God for your mother. If your mother is still with you, I pray that you will also ask God to bless her with faith, health, long life and peace. If you have no church to attend, please join us at Grace at 10:30 on Sunday mornings.

In Christ, Pastor Ed Skutshek