

## **An Easter Message for Tommy from the Masters Golf Tournament**

**by James H. Miller**

Easter Sunday, the most important day for Christians in America. The celebration of a living Christ. Millions of Americans up at sunrise worshipping Jesus.

Easter Sunday – also an important day for the media. The morning starts with the usual solemnity – talking heads speaking to politicians about the single most important topic in their lives, the Iowa caucuses. The pronouncement comes that the first primary is already over, not based on votes, but on the amount of money raised by the front-runners. The pundits proclaim that the race for President has come down to several individuals who have shown the ability to bring in millions of dollars for their campaigns. Voter preference – not all that important. You can't win without the money, or so they tell us. The few thousand watching are probably convinced that they are right. Underdogs – no chance. You must be a front-runner and you must have the money.

Noon approaches and the media focuses on a new set of pundits. Religious or spiritual? No – golf. Easter Sunday this year means a trip to the high temple of the sport in Augusta, Georgia. For five and a half hours, CBS will roll out its version of what Easter means to them. The only gods mentioned are the golf gods, who one presumes have rented space from Zeus on Mount Olympus. Apparently some older golfers now reside there, men like Byron Nelson and Bob Jones (the Jones thing is always confusing because of the other Bob Jones, the anti-Catholic bigot who set up a university in South Carolina). CBS probably means the golfing one.

Now comes the coverage of the last day of the tournament. The pundits have confirmed one and only one front-runner, Tiger Woods. No one really believes that he can lose. He has done it before, he is tops in earnings, and has a big-time reputation the media loves. As the day progresses, it is beginning to look as if they were right. Woods surges to the lead.

Unexpectedly the front-runner gets into trouble. The media pundits are flummoxed. They don't know what to do. They start scrambling around on air. New candidates emerge from thin air; golfers from South Africa, Australia, England, and Ireland are mentioned, but still it comes back to Woods. Even the other media favorite, Phil Mickelson, who has almost no chance of winning, is dutifully covered as he suffers through another embarrassing round.

Now it is late in the day, and something is happening that the pundits clearly do not understand. An unknown, coming out of nowhere, has assumed the lead. This is not in the script. The experts have told us that you must have experience

and certain credentials in order to win at Augusta. But this guy doesn't have either. His name is Zach Johnson and he is from, of all places, Iowa.

The coverage becomes more intense. Johnson is criticized on air for some golfing decisions that he makes on very long par 5 holes. He doesn't play them aggressively. The pundits call it a huge mistake. Later Johnson explains his strategy; he played within himself, never gambled on any par 5, and won the golf tournament because of this. But the experts don't know that. They only know that he has no chance. As they come down the final stretch, you hear the usual pretentious prattle about the "cathedral" of Augusta, the bravery of the shots, and occasionally the golfing gods.

Now we are coming to the end and Johnson looks as if he is going to win. He walks up the 18<sup>th</sup> fairway, but rather than acknowledging the whole golf industry by tipping his cap to the crowds, he walks over to one of his closest friends who happens to be his playing partner, grabs his hand, and walks up the fairway to the 18<sup>th</sup> green. Upon finishing his round, rather than the expected stumble into the media tent, he immediately goes to his wife and newly born son and hugs them, and then he embraces the dozens of friends who have gathered around the green.

Finally, a stern interviewer from CBS shoves a microphone in his face and starts the usual golf babble, asking how he won this tournament. Johnson does not even mention golf; he talks about the support of his friends, of his family and, most importantly, his belief in God – as the reason he has been successful. CBS looks like they are going to blow a fuse. This is not what is supposed to be said by the winner on the 18<sup>th</sup> hole at Augusta. Later we will learn that Zach Johnson is a very religious man from a small town in Iowa, who puts Jesus ahead of golf. We learn that his golf skills were not considered good enough for him to be a number one player on either his high school or college team. Yet he has won what is arguably the most important golf tournament in the world, and on Easter Sunday.

Are we seeing a real life parable that could repeat itself next year in his home state of Iowa? That the political pundits who have been telling us that only the front runners with money can win the Iowa caucuses might be wrong. Do the experts really know everything? In golf, we know that they do not. And by the way, it might not be a bad idea next Easter Sunday to be paying more attention to Jesus than to the pretentious pundits sitting at the 18<sup>th</sup> green at Augusta. Take heart all you politicians in Iowa who have been shunted aside by the media. If an Iowa guy can win the Masters, then an unknown guy can win the caucuses. If you think I am wrong, just go ask Tiger Woods.