John Landy and good sportsmanship

1 One of the greatest races I've ever seen was not at the Olympic Games, but at the 1956 Australian National Championships. At that time, John Landy was a champion mile runner and thousands of people had come to the championships to watch him win. In their hearts, they also held the hope that he'd set a new world record.

2 Landy's race started well and by the third lap, the young Ron Clarke and he were in the lead. Then an event occurred that I can't think of without my eyes filling with tears. Clarke was running just in front of Landy, when another runner tried to squeeze between them. Clarke tripped and fell, so all the runners had to jump over him. When Landy jumped, he accidently cut Clarke's shoulder with his spikes.

3 At that moment, Landy did the most beautiful and foolish thing. He stopped, ran back to Clarke and helped him to his feet. He brushed the cinders from Clarke's knees, checked his bleeding shoulder and apologised. Clarke wasn't badly hurt and urged Landy to keep going. Straightaway, they both took off, but they were now at least 50 metres behind the rest of the field.

4 In that last half mile, Landy sprinted. The crowd was on its feet and cheering when he finally caught up to the front two runners, stormed past them and won the race. As Landy did a victory lap, the applause didn't die down. Nobody cared that he hadn't broken the world record. They'd witnessed the greatest mile race in history.

5 Landy went on to set new world records and become a hero at the 1956 Olympics. But nothing ever compared to that summer night in Melbourne, when he forgot himself and stopped to help young Ron Clarke. This was the act of a fine sportsman and gentleman. After all these years, it remains my favourite sporting memory.

Adapted from a sermon by Reverend Dr Gordon Moyes, 2000.