

Jan 3, '19, Anthon UMC, Luke 5:1-11, "Jesus Chooses His Team"
Pastor Sheryl K Ashley

Happy Souper Bowl Sunday! How many of you like soup? How many of you like football? How many of you are planning to watch it today? How many are cheering for the Patriots? How many are cheering for the Rams? How many don't care which team wins?

In the playoff game between the Patriots and the Chiefs, I found myself cheering for which ever one was behind because it was such a close one, and I tend to have sympathy for the underdog. It was won in overtime by the Patriots. The toss of the overtime coin probably determined the outcome as that team got the ball first, but it was a tummy turner all the way.

I admit at the end I was secretly glad when the Patriots finally won because Tom Brady at 41 is old for a football player and at this point in my life, I cheer at old people winning anything. I think he must be like a big daddy to the other younger players on his team, directing them and encouraging them and still playing like a champion all the way for his team.

We followers of Christ are all to be like players on a team, each with our own God given talents working together to win. I suppose that is why I like the stories of Jesus calling the disciples to be on his team and how he starts training them to obey right away. Today Luke mainly features the calling of Simon Peter, and mentions his fishing partners, James and John. Peter is, from what I've read, thought to be the older one on Jesus' team. Our Lenten study will focus on Peter. He's "the man" who takes the chances, and for better or worse goes the second mile without a pause. I think we will relate to his strengths and weaknesses and learn from him. Sounds like Peter is the

team captain or the quarterback of his fishing team, somewhat like Tom Brady is on the football field for his team. Peter is not perfect but maybe neither is Tom Brady. After all, back in 2015 Brady got suspended without pay for four games, accused of knowing that the Patriots employees were deflating their footballs so they'd be easier to throw. Denying charges Brady refused to cooperate with investigators. But all in all, Tom seems to be genuine guy, right after his big wins he gives a shout out to his wife and kids and sisters and parents saying that he'll be right home. And Simon Peter, well Peter for all his weaknesses comes out on top with his captain Jesus. We all make mistakes. We all fail to live up to what we are called to do, but Jesus is there to keep calling us back and giving us another chance to help His team make the 1st down.

Jesus, according to Luke, by this time has gone through his own tests, which he never failed. There was the temptation in the wilderness, (that 40 day fast had to be painful), and there was being rejected in his own home town, (that had to hurt), but he's gone on never giving up. He's cast out demons and done some healing miracles, including healing Peter's mother in law. He's now peaching in the synagogues in other cities and these people are thronging to him. The Coach has come into his own.

It is at this time that Jesus goes to the Lake of Gennesaret, also called Sea of Galilee. The crowds are so taken by his words that God loves and accepts them and also with what Jesus can do for them physically, they almost edge him into the lake.

At the lakeshore Jesus finds a few guys experiencing failures in their chosen occupation of fishing and for whatever reason, like a far-sighted coach scouting for players, he sees in them what he is looking for, even if they and the rest of the world do not. Jesus wants them on his team. Jesus saw in them and sees in all of us the

potential we do not see and he calls us to follow him, commit ourselves to him and his goals, and take the hits it will take to play on His team. He has put more talent in your being than you will ever know unless you say, "Yes" to using them for the big win...the Kingdom of God. These particular guys did not feel like talented winners at this time. These fishermen had fished all night and they were about to hang it up. One group was out of their boat washing down their nets. After that long disappointing night the men probably wanted to go home, take a shower, grab some food and climb into bed. It was then Jesus got into Peter's boat and asked Peter to go out into the water a short way. Jesus began teaching the crowds that had gathered. Better than his being pushed out into the water that's for sure. But how do you hear someone's voice out in a boat across the water to the shore line? They'd never hear mine but Jesus must have had one of those megaphone voices you hear in a crowd that drowns out everyone else. A good coach is a good communicator. One signal and the players do as they are directed., hopefully.

When Jesus was done speaking to the crowd, he asked the fishermen to do something that their better judgement told them was useless. Peter even argued with Jesus, explaining that they had tried fishing all night but there were no fish there to be had. That is like the quarterback arguing with the coach. That can take you out of the game. They pay the coach big bucks to be far-sighted enough to direct the plays and the players to victory. That is like you and me not able to see the big picture our Coach Jesus sees, thinking we know better than God the right plays to make in our lives and refusing to do what we are asked and losing out on the great blessings of our lives.

I heard such a story about baseball player, Reggie Jackson, who once played for the Baltimore Orioles. The coach, Earl Weaver, had a rule that no one could steal a base unless given the steal sign. This upset Jackson because he felt he could judge when to steal. So, Jackson got a jump off the pitcher and beat the throw to second base. He shook the dirt off his uniform and smiled. He had proven that he knew when to steal a base.

Later Weaver took Jackson aside and explained why he had not given the steal sign. First of all, the next batter was Lee May, a great power hitter. When Jackson stole second, he left first base open. The other team walked May intentionally, eliminating his chance to hit a big run. Second, the next batter wasn't as good, so Weaver had to use a pinch hitter to try to drive in the men on base. That left Weaver without bench strength later in the game when he needed it. The problem was that Jackson saw only his piece of the game. Coach Weaver saw the whole game.

We too, see only a piece of the game, but God sees the whole game. When God sends us a signal we need to obey, no matter how smart we think we are.

So Peter, convinced by what he had seen and heard of this man Jesus obeyed. He got into the boat as did the rest of the men in theirs. If the effort failed then Jesus would know he was wrong. You gotta know when to hold 'em and when to fold 'em, and against his better judgement, Peter chose obedience. He did what his coach told him. After a bit of an argument he told Jesus he would do what ever he said. Low and behold the nets came up filled so full that both boats began to sink. I love it when the losing team pulls out a win and snatches victory out of defeat as did the newly called disciples that day when they obeyed.

So often we feel like the losing team and we protest when God calls that we are not worthy. In our first reading Isaiah was called by God and he protested, "Woe is me! For I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for my eyes have seen the King, Yahweh of Armies!" both Isaiah and Peter feel the magnitude of their unworthiness in the presence of the holy and protest their inability to win.. An angel cleanses Isaiah lips with a burning coal which did seemed to burn God's word into him spiritually rather than physically. Peter falls to his knees and pleads, "Go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man!" And Jesus has a cleansing word for Peter. Both Isaiah and Peter prove faithful to the call as they obey and are told to not be afraid for God has bigger fish for them to fry. They will be fishers of people...Old and New Testament.⁹

More disciples join the team as they are recruited. Soon Levi will be called,,,, then the twelve, then the seventy will be sent out. The list goes on and on.

God choses to work through Human beings, like you and me, vessels of clay, bearing the treasure of the Gospel. Because God chooses to work in this way, our response is crucial. Our team playing well with the Spirit of Christ directing us is the thing that makes all the difference between winning the world for Christ or losing it. This is no game that can be played again next year with a different team. Players come and go through the ages but our team under the banner of Jesus Christ plays on as long as the world survives. Evil can never be allowed to take the championship trophy home, along with our eternal souls. Those who play on the football teams can tell you they give their all, blood sweat and tears. There is nothing they wouldn't do to be in the final game.

Peter and the other disciples called that day and in the coming days, willingly leaving everything that would hold them back from winning the prize of eternal life for themselves and sharing it with others. They trained hard and never gave up. What is God asking you to do? What is God asking of you in your church, in your life? It may be as simple as being asked to make soup for a church event. Or to check so the water doesn't freeze in the church. Or to preach a sermon while the pastor is away. Or to reach out to do a kindness for someone suffering in some way. Or to teach a Sunday School class. Or to sing in the choir which is depleted with people going away for the winter. And I sure hope God is asking someone to serve as Chp of our Church Council as we've got no one in that slot. So many opportunities to use your gifts and talents for the glory of God. Take them!

Today we are celebrating that Becky Marshall said "yes" to God's call on her life to serve Him at Anthon UMC. Are you saying "Yes" to God about serving on His team? Think about it. After all, Jesus has carefully chosen you to be here for this time and this place. Don't miss your blessing for you are called to be part of God's greatness.