

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Perth
Sunday, February 25th, 2024
Rev. Gerry Gallant

Losing the Game of Life
Second Sunday of Lent
Mark 8:31-38

Welcome

Announcements

Call to Worship

The Lord is our light and our salvation:

Of whom shall we be afraid?

The Lord is the stronghold of our life:

We will wait for the Lord in faithfulness.

Let us seek the Lord's face in this time of worship:

We will honour God's presence in our prayers and our praises!

Prayer of Adoration and Invocation

God ever creating, ever loving, ever leading:

when things around us feel chaotic, you are peace.

When so much we hear is not reliable, your word is truth.

When we are paralyzed by fear and anxiety, your presence is freedom.

When we feel bereft and helpless, your love gives us hope.

God, you are the Source of all that matters.

We bring you our prayers and our praise this day,

for you reveal yourself to us in the goodness of creation,

in the love and mercy of Christ, your beloved,

and through the energy and wisdom of the Holy Spirit.

We worship you, O God,

ever Three and ever One, world without end. **Amen.**

Children's Hymn

Call to Confession

Prepare the way of the Lord!

Let us make our confession to God.

Prayer of Confession

God of compassion,
 We are creatures who seek our own comfort.
 We confess that we prefer our own plans to your purposes.
 We shrink from costly discipleship and put our own interests first.
 Forgive our fleeting commitment
 and the times we have indulged our own complaints.
 Have mercy on us.
 Inspire us with the energy to do your will
 and serve our neighbours in the example of Christ, your Son, and our Lord.

Assurance of Pardon

Friends in Christ, while it is true that we have all sinned,
 it is a greater truth that we are forgiven through God's love poured out in Jesus Christ.
 To all who humbly seek the mercy of God I say, in Jesus Christ our sin is forgiven
 Be at peace with God, with yourself, and with one another.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.
 Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
 Give us this day our daily bread.
 And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.
 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the Evil One.
 For Thine is the Kingdom, the power, and the glory,
 Forever and ever. Amen.

Responsive Reading**Psalm 22:23-31**

²³ You who fear the LORD, praise him!
 All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him,
 and stand in awe of him, all you offspring of Israel!

²⁴ **For he has not despised or abhorred
 the affliction of the afflicted,
 and he has not hidden his face from him,
 but has heard, when he cried to him.**

²⁵ From you comes my praise in the great congregation;
 my vows I will perform before those who fear him.

²⁶ **The afflicted shall eat and be satisfied;
 those who seek him shall praise the LORD!
 May your hearts live forever!**

²⁷ All the ends of the earth shall remember
 and turn to the LORD,

and all the families of the nations
shall worship before you.

**²⁸ For kingship belongs to the LORD,
and he rules over the nations.**

²⁹ All the prosperous of the earth eat and worship;
before him shall bow all who go down to the dust,
even the one who could not keep himself alive.

³⁰ Posterity shall serve him;

it shall be told of the Lord to the coming generation;

**³¹ they shall come and proclaim his righteousness to a people yet unborn,
that he has done it.**

Opening Hymn #672: "Jesus, Calls Us, O'er the Tumult"

Jesus calls us o'er the tumult
of our life's wild restless sea;
day by day his voice still calls us
saying, 'Christian, follow me.'

As of old Saint Andrew heard it
by the Galilean lake,
turned from home and work and kindred,
leaving all for Jesus' sake.

Jesus calls us from the worship
of the vain world's golden store,
from each idol that would keep us,
saying, 'Christian, love me more.'

In our joys and in our sorrows,
days of toil and hours of ease,
Jesus calls, in cares and pleasures,
'Christian, love me more than these.'

Jesus calls us: by your mercies,
Saviour, may we hear your call,
give our hearts in glad obedience,
serve and love you best of all.

Prayer for illumination
(Congregant Prepared)

Scripture

Mark 8:31-38

³¹ And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again. ³² And he said this plainly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. ³³ But turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man."

³⁴ And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ³⁵ For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. ³⁶ For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? ³⁷ For what can a man give in return for his soul? ³⁸ For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

Sermon

Who remembers the Milton Brady board game called 'The Game of Life'? Did you know that the game was originally created in 1860, by Milton Bradly himself. It was called 'The Checkered game of Life' and was played on a modified checkerboard which players earning points for landing on various good squares as the progressed through their life, from infancy which was the bottom left corner to their happy old age which was on the top right corner. The game was so popular it sold 45,000 copies in its very first year.

One Hundred years after its creation the Milton Bradly company dusted it off and gave it a whole new look. With a fancy colorful box, a cool looking board and fun little tokens replacing the basic checkerboard. They also updated the game by changing the points that were collected into money, and at the end of the game the player could end up in one of two places: The millionaire estates, or the countryside acres retirement home.

Through all of the decisions that players make in the game, from the career they choose to how they invest in the stock markets or donate to charities, the game was meant to simulate the ups and downs that all people go through in life. And like real life it was filled with surprises, with a spin of the spinner the players could find themselves suddenly doubling their money or losing everything that they had.

In the 1980's the game was marketed using the slogan, 'Be a winner at the Game of Life!' and every commercial that was aired from primetime to Saturday morning cartoons promoted the worldly idea of what it means to be a winner in this world. One commercial showed a family playing the game together, the tag line 'Be a winner at the Game of Life!' clearly presented and the announcer saying, 'get a job' and the little boy saying, 'I will be a doctor!' The announcer saying, 'Have a family' and the mom saying, 'I will have twins.' Then the announcer saying, 'Be a winner at the Game of Life!' and one of the players saying, 'I won the lottery',

then again, 'Be a winner at the Game of Life!' and a victorious stance as the winner declares, 'I am a millionaire.'

This is what it means to win at the game of life created by Milton Bradly, and as it turns out that is also what many other people in the world believe it means to win at this life that we are given by God. The world believes that winners are people who have power, wealth, influence, fame, beauty and live a life of freedom and without cares or worries. Winners are people who have a good education, a good job, and a good family background. Winners have no problems in their lives, no challenges, no trials, no tribulations, they live a life of comfort and relaxation. That is what the world calls a winner at 'The Game of Life', just look at the people that are idolized in the world today, athletes, movie stars, musicians, business moguls! No one cares how they got there, or even what they are like as a person, they just desire to have the wealth, fame, power or influence that person has, so that they too could be a winner at life.

After all, we all want to be seen as people who are winners. We don't ever want other people to see our struggles, or failures and our losses. Social media is a place filled with happy lies, not hard truths. We have an expression, 'Keeping up with the Jones' because it is important to seem like you are not falling behind the people around you in wealth, power, fame, and influence. We do not want to be seen as losers in 'The Game of Life', we want to be seen as the one who will end up in 'millionaire estates', not at 'countryside acres' with the other losers. However, real life is not a board game. The choices and decisions we make in our life, the ups and downs that occur do not get reset after we play for an hour and put the board game away. Every choice that we make in this world has a short-term and long-term effect on our lives and the lives of all those around us. Yet we still believe that the winners in life are the, Bill Gates, Jeff Bezos, Oprah Winfrey's, and Taylor Swifts of this world. The ones who we think retire wealthy and happy, while we trudge along in the normality of our lives.

In the Scripture that we are looking at this morning the worldly idea of who is a winner and loser in life is shown to be nothing like who God defines as the winners and losers of the life he has given us in this world.

In the Scripture Jesus begins by telling those gathered with him, something they did not want to hear, something that they did not want to even believe could be true.

Mark 8:31

³¹ And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again.

Jesus is speaking plainly, this is not a parable or tricky saying, he is telling those gathered in absolute honesty what is going to happen, the suffering that he has been called to endure. He tells the truth of his rejection by the religious leaders of the temples; he tells the truth that he will be killed. That he will suffer, die upon the cross and be resurrected after three days.

This is not what the Israelites were expecting of the one that they called their messiah. This talk of rejection and suffering and death is not what the Israelites wanted at all, that is losing to the Roman oppressor, not winning. In fact, they were expecting a great military leader, one who would come and overthrow their Roman oppressors, a winner. They wanted someone with power and influence, someone who could put the other nations in their proper place. A Messiah with power and wealth, who rules with his iron rod, not one who dies upon a cross.

Peter cannot stand the thought of the Messiah being rejected, being slandered, being tortured, and being killed upon the cross, the most shameful way that one could die. After all Peter had just a few lines earlier in the Scripture declared that he knew that Jesus was in fact the Messiah.

Mark 8:29

²⁹ And he asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered him, "You are the Christ."

Peter expects Jesus to be the winner that all of the Israelites are waiting for, and here is Jesus telling him that, that is not who He is. So, Peter, never want to keep his thought to himself and speaks up. He rebukes Jesus. Think about that for a moment. Peter has just told Jesus that he is in fact the Son of God and then he is telling Jesus that he has it all wrong. He tells Jesus that he needs to be the winner the Israelites want and not the loser that he is telling them he will be. Peter is doing what so many churches in the world today do, they try to remake Jesus into the man that they want to be, because they do not want to accept him the way he is and have to live their lives in obedience to his Word.

And take note on how Jesus responds. His words to Peter.

Mark 8:33

³³ But turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man."

Can you imagine how Peter felt at that moment? After all he believed that he was doing the right thing for the people of Israel, God's chosen people. He believed that he was just talking sense into his master and in response his master calls him Satan, the master deceiver, the evil one. Then Jesus goes on to clarify by telling him, you are not focused on Me, your focused on man.

This is the same response that the churches and people who are forming Jesus in their own image will get from Christ.

Matthew 7:21-23

²¹ "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. ²² On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your

name, and do many mighty works in your name?’²³ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’

Jesus does not hesitate to say that he is the only way to heaven, and the only way to him is through trusting and obeying him.

Even in today’s Scripture Jesus says.

Mark 8:34-48

³⁴ And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ³⁵ For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s will save it. ³⁶ For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? ³⁷ For what can a man give in return for his soul? ³⁸ For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”

Simply put, deny yourself, pick up your cross and follow Jesus. If you want to save your life in this world, your life will in fact be lost, but if you lose your life in this world for God and for the Gospel, it will be saved.

Jesus is telling everyone gathered there and listening to him that day, as well as every faithful Christian who has read his Scriptures, that if you want to be a disciple of Christ, you need to be willing to be a loser at the game of life, at least in worldly terms.

Christians need to be willing to deny themselves and deny what the world sees as valuable. Christians need to be willing to set aside a desire for worldly, wealth, power, fame, and influence, to reject what the world tells them is so vital and important in this world and instead pick up the cross and follow Christ, to obey the Scripture and find our worth in his teachings.

Too often when we hear the phrase ‘pick up our cross’ we think of it as some burden or hardship that we just need to endure for a short time to make it through to the blessings on the other side. This is not how the people of Jesus’s day understood this expression at all.

To the people gathered and listening to Jesus speak that day, picking up the cross had a much stronger meaning. It was not a burden to be carried a short distance and set down, it was a symbol of the oppression that the Roman empire had over them. It was a symbol of worldly power over God’s people, and it meant, suffering, shame, execution, and death. It would be like telling a group of French revolutionaries to pick up the guillotine and follow, or a cowboy to pick up his noose and follow, or today pick up your electric chair or lethal injection and follow.

The image of picking up your cross and following Christ meant being willing to go to your own death alongside Christ on the cross at the hands of the world who persecuted, shamed,

tortured, and executed the Lord. Following Christ means dying to the ways of this world, it is losing life in this world to gain life in the world that is to come.

Jesus drives home the point by asking, '**what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?**' What good does it do to win at this life on earth if at the end of it you lose it all anyways.

Sadly however, it seems most people would rather be considered a winner in worldly terms than to reap the rewards of an eternal life in the kingdom of heaven. Too many non-Christians and even people who call themselves Christians make their choices in this world not based upon the Word of God, but instead upon their saving face and power in this world. Too many people care more about what other people think of them and forget what really matter is what God thinks of us. Christians are called to live a life that is not always recognized and rewarded by people in this world, they are called to live a life that praise and glorifies God in everything that they think, say, and do.

When you live your life according to the Scripture, according to the commands of God, you are often going to be living a life that goes contrary to the ways of the world. Isn't this why Christ was rejected in the first place. He lived a life according to the Scriptures and not according to the teachings of the world around him. He lived a life that spoke out against the religious institutions of the Jews, the temples and synagogues that had become polluted by people seeking out worldly power, fame, influence, and wealth at the cost of God's truths. He spoke out for the welfare of all people, the sick, the lame, the blind, the beggar, the prostitute, the orphan, and the widow. People who had been lost and forgotten in the world's pursuit of its own desire.

He spoke out against the very things that the world at the time had just accepted as normal, because they went against the teachings of the Scripture. He loved everyone, yet he also told them the truth, they needed to change, to repent and return to the ways of God if they wanted to be saved.

By the standards of the world he was a loser, he had no money, no power, no fame, no real influence compared to the Sanhedrin. Yet he stood firm in the Word of God, he never tried to impress the religious leaders, he never stroked their egos, or gave into their ways for comfort and convenience.

He never gave into societal norms, instead he found all of his value and worth in doing the work of His Father in Heaven.

And if we are to pick up our cross and follow Christ, we need to find our worth the same way. In doing the work of our Father in Heaven in every aspect of our lives. Living to Glorify and honor the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in every word we use, every action or activity we participate in should be focused on promoting the Gospel and its Truth and building up the body of Christ.

As Christians motivation in this world should not be to win at the worldly game of life by gathering the most wealth, power, fame, or influence, it should be to honor and praise God every day.

After all, what good does it do for you to be a winner in this world, if it costs you everything in the world that is to come. Yes, God looks after us in this world, but not for the sake of this life, instead he is focused on getting us to the next life. He is concerned with our holiness not our comfort and happiness. Christ wants us to find value in the life that we have been given to live, to find value in the life of every person that we are given the chance to share the Word of God within this world. He wants us to reach out with the Love of Christ, with love, compassion, generosity, and truth.

He wants us to live lives of true faith, following him wherever he leads us, even if it is too our worldly death. As the children of God in this world we have been called to live our lives faithful to the Word of God, honoring God with all of our heart, soul and mind and using all of the time, talents, and treasures that God has blessed each of us with for His kingdom, not our own personal gain.

A Christians sole focus in this life should not be on this world, but instead on the Kingdom of God which is to come.

In Milton Bradly's Game of Life at the end everyone counts their money, and either ends up a winner in 'millionaire estates' or a loser in 'Countryside acres' and the game is over.

Real life is not like that. When life on this planet ends your wealth, fame, power, and influence are not tallied up by some heavenly accountant and compared to a spreadsheet to determine your eternal fate. The treasure you amass on earth has no meaning in the kingdom of heaven. Instead, your eternal fate is decided by the grace of God, and the treasures that you have stored up in His kingdom and you walked faithfully alongside him carrying your cross in this life.

So be a loser at the game of life. Do not be afraid to lose your worldly life and live for Christ alone. Pick up your cross, die to yourself and walk as the Salt and Light of God's Word in this world and when death comes you will reap the reward of everlasting life in the Kingdom of heaven for all of eternity.

Let us Pray,

Keep Us both Outwardly and Inwardly

O God,

you see that we have no strength in ourselves.

Keep us both outwardly and inwardly.

Defend us from all adversities which hurt the body,
and cleanse us from all evil thoughts

which afflict the mind;
 through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord,
 who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
 one God, now and forever.

Amen.

Source: Gregorian Sacramentary, 8th Century, Historic Collect for the Second Sunday in Lent

Hymn #342: "Just As I Am"

Just as I am, without one plea,
 but that thy blood was shed for me,
 and that thou bidd'st me come to thee,
 O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

Just as I am, and waiting not
 to rid my soul of one dark blot,
 to thee, whose blood can cleanse each spot,
 O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

Just as I am, though tossed about
 with many a conflict, many a doubt,
 fightings and fears within, without,
 O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

Just as I am, poor, wretched, blind;
 Sight, riches, healing of the mind;
 Yes, all I need, in Thee to find,
 O Lamb of God, I come, I come!

Just as I am, Thou wilt receive,
 Wilt welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve;
 Because Thy promise I believe,
 O Lamb of God, I come, I come!

Invitation to Offering

Offering

Presenting our tithes and offerings is an act of worship. I want to encourage you to write a cheque and drop it in the mail to the church using your envelope, if you have one. (St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, PO Box 161, 1 Drummond St W, Perth, ON K7H 3E3). We also have another option for you for giving and that is you can make an e-Transfer. This note from our treasurer:

E-transfers are now accepted. Please note the new email address for this purpose only. standrewspertthoffering@gmail.com If you have an Offering Envelope #, please include it in the message section of the INTERAC transfer page you fill in. If you wish any part of your donation to go to a specific fund (e.g., Presbyterian Sharing) please mention this in your message

Offertory Prayer

(Congregant Prepared)

Closing Hymn #393: "Nearer, My God, to Thee"

Nearer, my God, to thee, nearer to thee!
E'en though it be a cross that raiseth me,
still all my song shall be,
nearer, my God, to thee;
nearer, my God, to thee, nearer to thee!

Though like the wanderer, the sun gone down,
darkness be over me, my rest a stone;
yet in my dreams I'd be
nearer, my God, to thee;
nearer, my God, to thee, nearer to thee!

There let the way appear, steps unto heaven;
all that thou sendest me, in mercy given;
angels to beckon me
nearer, my God, to thee;
nearer, my God, to thee, nearer to thee!

Then, with my waking thoughts bright with thy praise,
out of my stony griefs Bethel I'll raise;
so by my woes to be
nearer, my God, to thee;
nearer, my God, to thee, nearer to thee!

Or if, on joyful wing cleaving the sky,
sun, moon, and stars forgot, upward I fly,
still all my song shall be,
nearer, my God, to thee;
nearer, my God, to thee, nearer to thee!

Pastoral Prayer

God of grace,
You are our Judge and our Hope.

Transform us with your love and harness our energy for your purposes in the world into which Christ came and for which he died.

We pray for the Church facing the challenges of rebuilding ministry and mission amid the uncertainties of this world.

Where congregations are tempted to guard traditions and resist new possibilities, where energy for leadership and community life has grown weaker, send your healing and transforming grace.

We pray for relationships suffering under the stress.

Where families are tempted to nurse grudges and harbour complaints, where friendships have been wounded by misunderstanding or neglect, where workplace tensions have arisen over clashing opinions or exhausting demands, send your reconciling and restoring mercy.

We pray for the world filled with increasing threats and conflicts.

Where countries are torn by unrest and persecution, where communities are diminished by prejudice and discrimination, where those with power and authority degrade or dismiss their critics, empower those who work for just solutions and advocate for the powerless.

We pray for all who are troubled and find it hard to face these uncertain times, we pray for those who face illness or loss of any kind, for those challenged by economic hardship, and for those faced with the reality of death, their own or of someone dear. Embrace each one with your compassion and courage.

Even as we remember the many challenges around us, we give you thanks for the blessings we know, for moments of pleasure, for laughter shared, for conversations that brightened a day.

Thank you for your steadfast love and the comfort we draw from your presence with us in all things. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, we pray. **Amen**

Benediction

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God, and of God's Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord; and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, remain with you always. **Amen.**