

PUTTING TOGETHER A WINNING TEAM

This Sunday is Super Bowl Sunday. This is America's biggest secular holiday! The commercials, the food, and the drinks: does anyone care about the game? I am sure that you have favorite! Is it the New Orleans Saints or the Indianapolis Colts? Who will win?

What makes a winning team? It's a combination of a good organization, insightful coaches, a great quarterback, skilled players, speedy receivers, committed line men, a stalwart defense, and an accurate kicker. A winning team practices hard, executes well, and has a desire to win. If this describes your team, you have a shot at the title!

Our text is about putting together a winning team: Jesus' team. It focuses on the call of Peter. It is interesting whom our LORD assembled as members of His team. They were fishermen, a tax collector, a couple of zealots (political radicals), and other common people. How many of them were considered to be superstars in the Jewish church None: no "religious superstars!" Yet this team did the unbelievable, the unimaginable, the impossible: with the power of Jesus they not only had a winning record, they are undefeatable!

How were the apostles able to become so skilled and successful in serving Jesus and battling Satan? How were they able to be so successful in their efforts to share the Good News of Jesus Christ with the world? First, they believed Jesus died and rose from the dead. Second, they had seen the resurrected Jesus and they believed that Jesus is the predicted Messiah. Third, they used the gifts that the Holy Spirit gave them. They made the most of the opportunities that came their way to proclaim the name of Jesus and teach the truths that they learned directly from Him. And fourth, they walked with Jesus. Not just during Jesus' three year earthly ministry, but every day as they followed Jesus' footsteps, example, and teachings.

In our Old Testament lesson we heard of the call of God to the prophet Isaiah. As he looked at the awesome throne of God and heard the LORD ask, "Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?" the prophet heard himself reply, "Here am I! Send me!" The prophet learned when he answered the call to serve the LORD that people are not always willing and eager to receive the message of God's grace and love. Sometimes people will resist the message, resent the messengers, and even deny the existence of God.

Throughout history God has added people to His team. Each member has been gifted by the Spirit. Each member has a unique talent to share. Each member has had something to offer. Each member is convinced that Jesus is the Savior, that Jesus rose from the dead after sacrificing His blood for the sins of the world, and is committed to live by His Word. Jesus continues to recruit members of His team to this very day. Who is on Jesus' team today? All believers, including you and me!

The call of Jesus goes out to you and me. Do you want to be on the winning team? Do you want to be a winner? Then join with St. Peter who responded to Jesus' call and committed his life to Jesus. No, you all don't have to become a pastor, teacher, deaconess, or DCE. Yes, you are called to live and share with others your faith that Jesus is the LORD and Savior. Of course, satan is going to tempt us to resist Jesus call and decline His invitation. Some of those arguments include: I am not skilled in sharing the Gospel with others; I am too busy with other priorities in life; I don't have enough time; I am a bit selfish – I am glad that I am saved but don't want to share it with others; or I am just not interested. How will you respond to satan's arguments to reject God's call?

Have you ever thought about why God called Isaiah, St. Peter, St. Paul, and you and me? God loves sinners and wants all to repent and be saved. God wants people to know that in His gracious love He sent His only begotten Son to die for their sins. God wants people to know that the resurrection is our assurance that He accepted Jesus' blood sacrifice. God wants people to hear the Good News of Jesus, repent for all their sins, and be saved. God wants you and me to be the ones who tell them!

Just think, you and I can be another Andrew! Andrew was St. Peter's brother. Andrew had met Jesus and was convinced He was the promised Messiah and Savior of the world. In his love for his brother Peter, he invited Peter to come and meet Jesus. Just as Andrew introduced his brother to Jesus, we too can introduce our loved ones to Jesus.

What is the big difference between the Super Bowl team and Jesus' team? There are no passive spectators sitting on the sidelines on Jesus' team. Think about it. It is amazing how we identify ourselves with one of the two teams in the Super Bowl. We will sit in a soft chair, guzzle our favorite beverage, stuff ourselves with food, and wildly cheer for our team. We get so emotionally involved with a team we watch that we project ourselves as part

of our team. In reality, the success or failure of our favorite Super Bowl team has absolutely nothing to do with us. We have made no contribution to our team's effort. We are passive; we are not a participant!

On the other hand, it is not so on God's team. There are no passive observers, no dead weight. We are called to be involved: in teaching, in prayer, in service, in helping and caring, in witnessing and outreach. We are all participants! There are no spectators on Jesus' team; we are all players!

In our text Jesus called on Peter to have faith in Him. Although he told Peter to fish where most fishermen know you don't catch fish, Peter followed Jesus' directions. When Jesus' advice brought a record catch, Peter asked Jesus to leave him because Peter knew he was in the presence of God, and as a sinner was out of place. Jesus then absolved him of his sins. Jesus invited Peter to follow Jesus and catch men instead of fish. Immediately, Peter did. Our sins may leave us with guilt; we too might at times feel out of place in the presence of God. But in grace God was to wash away ours. Just as with Peter, God calls us to join His team.

Years later, after watching Jesus, learning from Jesus, and witnessing for Jesus, Peter wrote two letters, two epistles. In them Peter gives us some good advice. In his First Epistle Peter urges us to be prepared to share with others our faith that Jesus is our Savior. In his Second Epistle Peter encourages us to be prepared for the Second Coming of Jesus. Follow Peter's advice and you prepared to be on Jesus' team.

Who will be the winning team today? Will it be Indianapolis or New Orleans? Be on Jesus' team and you will be a winner today and everyday. In Jesus' name, amen!