

September 8, 2024

Text: Psalm 40:1-5: Mark 7:31-37

Title: "Breaking Out of the Huddle"

Since we're at the beginning of the pro football season, I will share this story I found a while back entitled "A funny thing happened at the football stadium." After taking the opening kick-off, the home team went into a huddle as usual to get the formation from the quarterback and to encourage one another. Then came the unusual. The team didn't break out of the huddle! Soon the red flag was dropped, and the referee stepped off a five-yard delay of game penalty. And yet, the team still didn't leave the huddle! The crowd became exasperated and then angry and then they got bored with it all. The referee ruled that the home team had forfeited the game.

No, that's not a true story, thankfully. But, **here we are in the huddle again. AND THAT'S IMPORTANT.** The huddle of Christian worship is where we receive encouragement and instruction. A newspaper once carried a story about an 86 year old woman who had not missed attending church in 1,040 Sundays. The writer went on to comment that this was amazing considering all the things that can come up in our lives like family gatherings, or trips out of town, or bad weather, etc.

"What's the matter with Mrs. Jones anyway?" The article asked. (No relation to any of our Mrs. Jones.) My guess is that Mrs. Jones has found something in this "huddle" that's important to her life. It may be the fellowship. It may be the music, or even possibly, the preaching. The huddle is important. **BUT THE HUDDLE IS**

NOT THE GAME. The game is how we live in the world. It's what we do after we leave this place. The game is our witness to what Christ has done in our lives.

Someone brought to Jesus a man who was deaf and had a speech impediment and asked Jesus to lay his hand upon him and heal him. And it says that, "*He took him aside in private, away from the crowd...*" Jesus wasn't interested in becoming a celebrity. In fact, after Jesus healed this man, "...Jesus ordered them to tell no one..." There are a couple things about getting the message out that we need to see.

FIRST OF ALL, AUTHENTIC CHRISTIAN FAITH SELLS ITSELF.

Christian faith doesn't require hype. It does not require us to make nuisances out of ourselves with our neighbors. We don't need to hit them over the head with the fine points of our theology. No hard sell, no gimmicks required.

We don't need gimmicks to bring people to faith in Christ. Notice what happens in this story from Mark's Gospel. "...Jesus ordered them to tell no one; but the more he ordered them, the more zealously they proclaimed it" (v. 36). The truth of the matter is that Christ couldn't be hidden. When you find someone who could do the things he did, people are going to tell about it. When you find people who live like he lived, others are going to notice. (How can I testify to this fact? Tell them about Bob Epperson; If God is Love, 1 John, you would then see God through loving acts on the part of people who love God) The Gospel message sells itself.

Secondly, **AUTHENTIC CHRISTIAN LIVES ARE THE BEST ADVERTISING FOR OUR FAITH.** An elementary teacher in a public school was

a devout Roman Catholic. She had studied to be a nun but decided that she was better suited for a lay vocation. She was teaching a class in reading, but she told the children, "You don't have to write or talk sometimes to get your point across." By way of example she stuck out her thumb and asked, "What does this mean?" The students all said, "I want a ride." Then she asked, "What does this mean?" (She held her finger up across her mouth.) They all said, "Be quiet." Then she turned to one child and asked, "What can you say using signs?" He held up his hand flat to say STOP. She asked another little boy to do one, and he gave the Catholic sign of the Cross, touching his forehead and crossing his chest. That just thrilled this devout teacher who once thought of becoming a nun. She said, "Jerry, what does that mean?" He said, "That means I'm gonna shoot a free throw."

A religious sign out of context can be confusing. What's not confusing is when we live our lives (albeit imperfect) with the integrity, love and self-giving of Jesus Christ. We don't have to be loud about it. All we need is to be consistent.

Something to think about this morning as we gather on the first Sunday of the football season, as we near the time when we break huddle and head back out on the playing field. Let the real game begin!