

2.7.2016 Quinquagesima (Luke 18:31-33)
St. Andrew's Anglican Church - Jacksonville, Oregon

"Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be always acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength and my redeemer." (Psalm 19:14)

Americans loves sports. The glaring example of that today is Super Bowl 50. When they kickoff this afternoon in front of 75,000 people packed into a stadium that cost well over \$1 billion to construct, America will be watching. In this country alone, over 100 million people are expected to watch the big game. So, what is it about football, and sports in general, that so captures our attention?

If you're an athlete, perhaps it's the challenge, the personal growth, or the thrill of competition. For the sports fan, maybe it's rooting for the underdog, owning the jersey that makes you part of the team, or watching a group of gifted athletes come together to accomplish something truly spectacular. There are as many ways to answer the question of why we love sports, as there are people in this room; but this morning, consider this answer: We love sports, because sports have rules.

We love sports because sports are guided by rules that are to be applied fairly to everyone – no matter what. Don't you wish life was like that? At the game today there will be a referee, an umpire, a head linesman, a line judge, a field judge, a side judge, a back judge, a replay official, and a replay assistant! So many officials and the 70,000 word NFL rule book are evidence that the rules governing the games we play are central to why we love to play the game. We need so many officials and a rule book that thick because when the game begins, when you step on what they call "hallowed ground", for just a little while you escape the injustice of this world. It doesn't matter if you're playing professional football or a game of cards on your dining room table; for that period of time the rules have provided the boundaries of fair play.

The rules that govern the game and the penalties enforced if you break those rules help us develop a love for the game by fulfilling our God-given need for justice. When your opponent lines up offside it will cost them five yards, a block in the back will cost ten, and roughing the passer will give them a fifteen yard penalty and you a first down. Off the field our lives are not governed by such absolute regulations. In sharp contrast, when we

step outside the stadium, often life isn't fair. If your own experience doesn't confirm that fact, just read the morning paper, watch the evening news, or listen to these words from our Gospel reading this morning. "Then Jesus took unto him the twelve, and said unto them, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of man shall be accomplished. For he shall be delivered unto the Gentiles, and shall be mocked, and spitefully entreated, and spitted on: and they shall scourge him, and put him to death..." (Luke 18:31-33a)

Clearly, this is not a game. Games have rules, penalties, and a punishment that fits the crime – a punishment that seeks to satisfy every human being's innate sense of justice. A God-given need for justice that even the thief on the cross next to Jesus pointed to when he said to his companion, "...we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong." (Luke 23:41) "He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in His mouth." (1 Peter 2:22) Yet, the perfect Son of God would be left alone to suffer and die a torturous death at the hands of sinful men. Does that sound like justice? Perhaps the inability of the world to see any justice in this event is why "the preaching of the Cross is to them that perish foolishness". (1 Corinthians 1:18)

Like the thief on the cross, we recognize the fact that we should receive "the due reward of our deeds". We know: "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God". (Romans 3:23) We've stepped offside and the penalty for our infraction was not 5, 10, or 15 yards; it was death. Our rulebook states clearly, "For the wages of sin is death..." (Romans 6:23) For God's perfect justice to be served this penalty must be assessed, sin and death have entered the world; and that brings us to another reason we love sports: Sports have heroes.

Sports have heroes that take the field when the crowd is at the edge of their seat, saying, "It's too late, game over." From the moment sin entered the world it was game over, but then a Hero – the Savior of the World stepped onto the field. You see, God is not a billionaire taking in the view from the owner's box while his team self-destructs. God is not a distant, cosmic force that created the world and then left it spinning on its own. God, in Jesus Christ, is a person. A person who stepped into the world He

created and willingly laid down His life to redeem all that we lost. (John 10:18)

St. Paul wrote in our Epistle this morning, "For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known." (1 Corinthians 13:12) We see through a glass, darkly; but even from the dark view this side of heaven offers, by the grace of God we recognize the fact that rules have been broken, a penalty has been assessed, a price must be paid, and the unimaginable truth that God loves us so much that He sent His one and only Son to pay that price – to die in our place. The victory we celebrate today was not won on the field. It was won on the Cross at Calvary.

"To the only wise God our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever. Amen." (Jude 1:25)