

Superbowl Spirit
By Rev. Todd Farnsworth
1 Corinthians 9: 16-23



16 For when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, since I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! 17 If I preach voluntarily, I have a reward; if not voluntarily, I am simply discharging the trust committed to me. 18 What then is my reward? Just this: that in preaching the gospel I

may offer it free of charge, and so not make full use of my rights as a preacher of the gospel. 19 Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. 20 To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. 21 To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. 22 To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. 23 I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.

The early church trying to get a playbook together about what was acceptable and unacceptable behavior within the new religion. Some folks came from Jewish background with strict rules and expectations (read that, no playing with pigskins!), other folks came from a more diverse background and were trying to embrace this new Jesus thing that had profoundly touched their lives. Paul had come to understand that the Laws of Moses and the religious leaders of his day were transcended by Jesus' command to love God and one another. He understood that Christians were not confined by statutes that did not take humanity and compassion into account. He was not too worried about dietary laws or rules that kept

people apart from one another. He understood that in Jesus, all things were made right. But he didn't want to get in the way of folks who didn't share that understanding, so he restrained himself from certain activities and took on other enterprises that would give him common footing with the folks he was trying to introduce to Jesus. For example, were Paul to show up in worship this morning, I think he would sound something like this:

Alright sports fans, huddle up and take a listen. As you know, today is the big day and to make sure that we are all on the same page, Coach has sent me in to communicate to you in a language we hope you'll understand. It's my pleasure to be called on for this undertaking. I should begin by saying that I am a free agent. (I see you already had your pregame feast, just remember that this banquet is your touchstone today. It's a reminder that like God, we don't take sides (excuse me, my robe is feeling a little warm...*removes robe to reveal Patriots shirt*) however we are called to take God's side. We don't belong to anyone besides the Holy and so to communicate that fact, I will become a servant to everyone. To the Philly fans I'll become an Eagle (as they say, to the "weak I became weak) and to the New England fans I'll become a GRONK..I'm sorry, I meant to say, Patriot. My goal is to win you all to the One who is cheering you on today from the best sky seats in the stadium. To the winners will go a cooler full of Gatorade baptism!

Are you with me so far? Good. Then let's review:

To begin with you'll need to be equipped for the task before you. Put on your cleats fitted with readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. Make

sure you have padding of righteousness secured into place with a belt of truth. Tape your fingers of faith to protect yourself from the spiraling footballs of those who would crush you. Finally, take the helmet of salvation which is the word of God. It will keep your head in the game and allow you to carry out the plays contained in the great playbook of faith.

Now that you're all girded up, I turn your direction to the football. Like the Bible, it is important not to over or under inflate it. We've heard of some teams that ignore its contents and others that turn it into an object of idolatry. I suspect you've all heard of Deflate-gate? Terrible terrible scandal in which the underinflated became overinflated in what many considered a sheepish move by a GOAT. Many people horned in on muddy topic, but in the end it became a lesson for all. Even though it is at the center of most of the game, the one object everyone wants to get their hands on, it is in fact, not the game. There are plays to learn, strategies to execute, and faith that your team has what it takes to get themselves safely into the endzone.

Speaking of which, let's huddle up and review the ways we play the game.

- First I will speak of the defensive position. This is when we are blocking the spiritual opposition from getting the upper hand on us. We might employ prayer, ritual, or the brute force of our community/teammates to thwart the opposition from gaining yardage. The defense is sometimes called to take action and tackle an issue or play that is trying to make an end run around God's ways. We might be trying to take down a diversion like racism or a blind side around homelessness. We may see a Statue of Liberty unfolding around

immigration or a hook and ladder with regard to human rights. In these cases it is good to put the weight of your faith and faith community behind the tackle so that the transgressor is stopped definitively. Eyes open, ears open, hearts open, we must prevail against these basic affronts to our faith.

- Once we have the ball, it is our turn to make a run for it. Or a pass. Or a field goal. With speed, agility, grace, and God's blessing we move as a team toward our end goal (which in our case is resurrection) so that each player will have a chance to dance in the endzone. Surely there will be fumbles and interceptions as we play the game, but if we return to the playbook and check ourselves to commit once again to the goal, we will succeed. We have already succeeded. Jesus has ensured that through his ministry of mercy and grace, his death, his resurrection.
- So just go out there today and play a good game. Play hard, have fun, shake off the misplays and get back onto the field. God will be with us. God will be with you. Tell that to the announcers who cry, "all is lost!" I've seen comebacks that defied logic or expectation. God will be with us.

Paul became all things to all people without losing his theological integrity. He adjure's us to do the same. Whether we are speaking to people caught up in politics, or theater, rug hooking, or the Superbowl, let's get to know our neighbors, and with the creative gifts of the Holy Spirit, find the

language to tell our faith, Let's work to *become all things to all people so that by all possible means we might bring some closer to God's love. Do all this for the sake of the gospel, that we may share in its blessings* in Jesus' name and to his glory ... TOUCHDOWN! AMEN.