

Living in the Light of Eternity

Choose Your Moves



We are in a series of sermons that compare our lives to the game of Monopoly. When you play a game of Monopoly, your turn will come up. You will have to roll the dice and move your marker – and you will have to make decisions about HOW you are going to play. In this game we call LIFE, each one of us have to take our turn. And in doing that, you will also have to choose your moves, decide how you are going to play -- Will you play it safe, or take a risk? Will you aim to get all you can, or help other people even if it hurts your chances of getting ahead? Like Monopoly, in this game we call life you have to choose your strategy.

Right now we are going through this time of *huge* change! There are changes to our lifestyle – like wearing masks, staying away from others, and being at home so much. Everyday there is bad news about the threat to everyone’s health, and there is a lot of economic uncertainty. Maybe you are one of thousands of people who have been laid off, or lost jobs.

In this time of HUGE change, we can’t help but stop and think and evaluate our lives. You can’t help but ask some really deep questions -- Questions like: am I playing this game of life, the way I want to? Am I living with my heart open and giving my all? Or am I just playing it safe, retreating from living fully? Is my game strategy in life to honor God – to use my God-given abilities and my one life to the absolute fullest? Am I living with other people as the focus of my energy? Or am I playing just to win for myself? In times like these, we ask ourselves the deep questions like: What’s my strategy? What’s my mission? What am I playing for, *really*? What’s God’s Calling on my life?

That’s what we are talking about today – because today, it’s *your* turn. Choose your moves.

Choose Your Strategy: Comfort? or Calling?

Jesus once told a story about a rich man who played the game of life. He had a very clear strategy. Jesus said:

"The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. ¹⁷He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.'

¹⁸"Then he said, 'This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. ¹⁹And I'll say to myself, "You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.'"

Luke 12:16-19

This rich man took his turn, and he gave 110%. He had ambition and energy! But his strategy was all about himself. His game plan, his mission and Calling was all about experiencing the most comfort and pleasure in life.

Do you remember how this story ends? In the end, Jesus sums up this man's life by saying he was so foolish. He lost everything that really matters because he was not **"rich toward God."** He was not answering God's Calling on his life. He lived for comfort and got it. But he had NO relationship with God. And in the end, only love for God and God-motivated love for others LASTS. Everything else goes back in the box.

For you and me, without guidance from God in the Bible, without guidance from others who are wise Christ-followers, we too are likely to choose a game strategy that is all about selfish desires. Your life mission is all about **YOURSELF**. Your Calling becomes comfort. You and I pursue **FUN** desires, but not **GOD'S** desires.

We do this, God tells us in the Bible, because when the first people turned away from God, they pushed Him out of their lives, and they refused to follow God's leading so they could follow their own leading. They put **THEMSELVES** in the center of their lives, instead of God. And since then, you and I and all people

are born self-centered and selfish. We put our OURSELVES as # 1 in our life – in the place that God should be in our lives. We make ourselves to become our own little god -- and we live for our plans, our desires, our comfort.

That's what sin is all about. And a life lived without God, leads to an eternity without God.

This shows up in our lives. This shows up when we want God to do OUR plans, and accomplish OUR desires, and help us get our comfort. Instead, mature Christ-followers learn to give up their lives and plans in complete surrender to God. It's not about them any longer. Their game strategy is all about answering GOD's Calling. That's a huge difference!

So stop and evaluate. If your life has been with you and your plans, your desires, your comfort in the center, then it's time to head in a new direction. It's time to ask God for forgiveness. It's time to turn around, and come to God, and ask Jesus to forgive your small and self-centered pursuits. And He will. He will because Jesus loves you so much, that He gave His life up to pay the price – pay the penalty – of all your wrongs, all your mistakes, all your sins of pushing God out of His rightful place in the center of your life. His forgiveness is certain! And complete. For everyone – including you. And His forgiveness is available for you TODAY. This is God's gift – His FREE gift – to you today.

With God's forgiveness, you are filled with such gratitude and thankfulness to Him, that you WANT God in the center of life. Your life is all about God – about following God. His Calling, His mission – also shows up in your life.

When God and others become the focus of you life you have: affection for others, exuberance about life, serenity, willingness to stick with things, you no longer feel the need to force your way in life. (Galatians 5:22-23)

Isn't that a better way to live? You see, folks, in this game of life, Take your turn! Give it 110%! And as you do that have a strategy that isn't about comfort, it's not all about you. Let it be

all about God. Because, **Your Calling is not about you.** Jesus once said this:

"If anyone would come after Me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me."

He said, IF anyone would come after Him. "If" : He doesn't force you. He invites you with His love and grace.

"Deny yourself" -- it's not about YOU. Your life, your strategy, and mission – your Calling – is not about you. It's all about following Him. Following Him where? Jesus is headed to the cross. So your life is about following God's calling to live for GOD'S purposes and to benefit others.

Now, taking up your cross is not about suffering. It's not about being sick and going around "oh poor me!" Instead, taking up your cross is all about staying closely connected with Jesus. It's about going **WHERE HE'S GOING!**

Jesus said: ***"³⁵For whoever wants to save his life will lose it...."*** if you live for yourself, for pleasure, for taking the cushy way – you can't follow Jesus. So give it up! That life will lose anyway! It's meaningless, purposeless, empty.

"But" Jesus said: ***"whoever loses his life for Me and for the gospel will save it."*** THAT's the Calling! That's the Mission. Letting God and HIS purposes be the very center of your life ends up 'saving it' -- you end up with joy, and peace, and hope, and heaven to come. (It don't get any better than that, folks!)

Jesus summarized it this way: ***"³⁶What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?"*** *Mark 8: 34-36* Say you play the game of life really well, and you GET power, money, comfort, status, pleasure, achievements, popularity – BUT you don't know Jesus. You don't have forgiveness. You don't have meaning in life. You don't have heaven coming. Then, you've really gained nothing. Winning without Jesus is called losing.

Your Calling starts where you are.

There's a story told of a husband who came home from work. The house was a disaster. The baby was crying, dirty

dishes were all over the counter, dirty laundry was hanging from doorknobs, the TV was blaring, beds were unmade, carpets had junk on them, and dinner was uncooked. When he wanted to know what happened, his wife told him, “You know how you always ask me what I’ve been doing all day? Well, today I didn’t do it.”

Sometimes we’re tempted to think that God’s Calling for your life is different that your current position, or job, or situation. But your calling starts where you are.

This doesn’t mean that you should never change jobs or move. It means that if your mission and calling in life can’t start right now, where you are, then it can’t start at all.

Jesus’ idea was that when someone began to follow Him, that person would become the sharer of good news to everyone in the neighborhood, at the office, or in the school.

Your Calling will use your strengths. Sometimes we think we can’t do anything impactful in life, because we aren’t good at anything. That’s not true.

When God called Moses, God asked him, “Moe – what’s in your hand?” Moses was holding his shepherd’s staff. It was nothing special, but it represented Moses’ flock, his wealth, his security – everything Moses knew how to do. And God used that powerfully.

What do you have in your hand? God’s given you temperament, experience, relationships, your mind, your education – all of these strengths God will put to use in your life Calling as you follow God. If you are looking for the game strategy God has for you, look to your strengths.

Your Calling will also use your weaknesses. Sometimes people think they don’t have any chance of doing something important and significant with their life, because of their weaknesses. But the truth is, God can do something important and powerful through you *BECAUSE* of your weaknesses. God never wastes a hurt. No one is able to help alcoholics more than recovering alcoholics. No one can speak to those who grieve better than one who has

suffered deep loss. What loss, what weakness do you have in your life? Give it to God and let Him turn it around into something powerful to be used for His purpose in your life.

Your Calling will require sacrifice. Oooh! We don't like to hear that word "sacrifice"! Sacrifice – count me *out!*

If you look through the Bible, how many times does God Call a person and say to him or her: "This will be really quick, it will be easy, it will be convenient for you, there's nothing to it." Rough guess – anyone – how often that happens in the Bible? ... None! Never does God call a person to something quick and easy and convenient.

The reason that your Calling will require sacrifice is that God's not interested in what you can DO for Him -- He's interested in YOU! And He wants you to get to the end of your rope, where you *can't* do it on your own, so you learn to rely on Him, and trust Him, and love Him.

Folks, today ... **Where is God Calling you?**

- **To serve?**
- **To grow spiritually?**
- **Relationally?** To talk to, or forgive, or have a long-overdue conversation with someone in your life?
- **To talk to someone who needs the hope or the answers that only Jesus offers?**

Whatever God's Call is in your life, Give it ALL YOU'VE GOT!

Now, if you are a part of this congregation, here's my concern. We are all in this time of pandemic. There is financial uncertainty. Health uncertainty. In times like this people – even Christians – are filled with worry and fear. Our natural response is to withdraw. To protect ourselves. To be like a turtle and retreat into our own little shell.

Here's the challenge we face as a congregation. Let's not focus on self-preservation of this church. Let's trust God to take care of that. Instead, let's focus on God's Calling. Let's focus on

the mission, the vision, the opportunities God is setting right at our doorstep to serve Him by loving people.

People need God now like none of us have ever seen in our lifetimes. It is for such a time as this that God has put us here. Now it is time for us to take our turn. What will our game strategy be?

God has given us – the people of St. Paul Lutheran Church – the awesome news of forgiveness and hope in Jesus Christ. So let's not follow the example of the rich fool who tried to play it safe by keeping all he could. Instead, let's follow in the footsteps of Jesus Christ! He gave His all so that precious people, eternal souls, would know forgiveness and life eternal.

We're all playing this game we call life. Each day is a shot to take our turn. So, give it all you've got! – for God, in gratitude for all He has done, is doing, and will do in you and for you. Amen.