

***Faith on the 50-Yard Line***  
**Message for North East United Methodist Church**  
**February 4, 2018**

Today, many of us will sit down in front of our televisions to the ultimate sporting event...the SuperBowl. We will watch as the Philadelphia Eagles take on the New England Patriots in Minneapolis.

I have always cheered for the Baltimore Ravens, but have found myself affected and touched by the Philadelphia Eagles this season, and find myself mixing green along with the purple I've sported for years. The Rocky-like underdogs pulling together through injuries...a town desperate for their first SuperBowl win...but most of all...the stories of faith...

I had heard some of these stories when I had the privilege of meeting Ted Winsley, chaplain for the Philadelphia Eagles, when he spoke at Janes UMC a couple years ago...but as I have watched and cheered the Eagles this postseason, in researching this message, I have been inspired by the faith of many of these players...

**SHOW VIDEO - <https://youtu.be/6bnEY13vAok>**

Some of the most famous and successful NFL players, past and present, are men of strong Christian faith. Players like Aaron Rodgers, Robert Griffith III, Adrian Peterson, Drew Brees, and Tim Tebow are all very devout Christians. Several NFL football players have gone on to become ministers or to start Christian organizations including coach Tony Dungy, defensive back Miles McPherson, middle linebacker Ken Hutcherson, and defensive end Napoleon Kaufman.

Many in the NFL are not afraid to share their faith, on and off the field, and live it openly regardless of the circumstances.



Tim Tebow, after being cut by the New York Jets, tweeted, *“Proverbs 3:5-6: Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding...in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight.”*



When Tebow was cut once more by the New England Patriots. His response was once again one of faith... *“I would like to thank Mr. Kraft, Coach Belichick, Coach McDaniels and the entire Patriots organization for giving me the opportunity...to be a part of such a classy organization. I pray for nothing but the best for you all...2 Corinthians 12:9: And He has said to me, “My grace is sufficient...for you, for power is perfected in weakness.” Most gladly, therefore, I will rather...boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me.”*

Carsen Wentz, having a Most Valuable Player season, leading the Eagles to first place in their division at 10-2, suffered a season-ending knee injury in December, tearing his left ACL while battling against the Los Angeles Rams. Wentz’s response showed a strong and inspiring faith. Wentz put this out on the internet the day after his injury - <https://youtu.be/2arBBH3iW3Q>

Tom Osborne, former coach of the University of Nebraska football team, writes...



*“I was convinced that the basic tenets of Christianity provided a solid foundation upon which to build a life – as well as a football program. The basic “building blocks” as I see them can be summarized as follows:”*

Osborne goes on to give several “building blocks” of faith.

First, **Everyone is equal in God’s sight.**

Osborne writes, *“There is no distinction on the basis of race, religion, or social position – or first, second, or third string on a football team. We are all created in God’s image and are of equal value.”*

Paul writes...

***“So you should not be like cowering, fearful slaves. You should behave instead like God’s very own children, adopted into his family, calling him “Father, dear Father.” For his Holy Spirit speaks to us deep in our hearts and tells us that we are God’s children.”***

**-Romans 8: 15-17**

Faith is remembering, realizing, that you are a child of God...that you were created in His image, that God created this world for you, that God loved you so much He sent Jesus to die for you...Faith is seeing others as equal to yourself, children of God, perhaps lost, perhaps sinful, perhaps different, but nonetheless a child of God, and treating them as such. God is about love not hatred or indifference.

Second, **Everyone has missed the mark** in terms of being everything God has called him or her to be.

Osborne writes, *“No one is perfect and everyone makes mistakes. Realizing this, I tended to be more understanding of players’ failings than some thought I should be.”*

Paul writes...

***“For all have sinned; all fall short of God’s glorious standard.”***

**-Romans 3:23**

Compared to others, we often feel we are doing “alright,” that we are “pretty good” people, but compared to the glory of God, the holiness of God, the beauty of God, we fall awfully short.

Yet, Paul continues...

***“Yet now God in his gracious kindness declares us not guilty. He has done this through Christ Jesus, who has freed us by taking away our sins.”***

**- Romans 3:24**

As one person said, *“There is a God and I am not Him.”* Faith is recognizing that we are “sinners,” a word no one likes, but nonetheless we are...we have all fallen short...we all messed up...

One reason I know I need God...I need a Savior...is my intense hatred for the New England Patriots...I need forgiveness...grace...

We all live lives which are at times in opposition to what God created us for...yet, faith is also understanding that God, in His grace, made a way...He freed us...through his Son, Jesus Christ, God took away our sin.

That leaves us to Osborne’s third point.

Third, **Jesus reveals the depth of God’s love** for each person.

Osborne writes, *“There is a difference between intellectually understanding that God loves you and experiencing God’s love. I saw remarkable spiritual changes in players when they were fully impacted by the extent of God’s love as revealed by Jesus.”*

In the church, the world, we see remarkable spiritual changes in people as they are fully impacted by that fact that Jesus came to take away their sin, to cover them, to declare them not guilty before an all-powerful and Holy God...

Paul writes...

***“God saved you by his special favor when you believed. And you can’t take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the***



***good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it. For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so that we can do the good things he planned for us long ago."***

**- Ephesians 2: 8-10**

Quarterback Kurt Warner says, *"The first step in God's plan for you is for you to give your heart to Jesus. If you believe that God loves you so much that he allowed his son to take the punishment for every sin you'll ever commit, you can begin a new life. But your acceptance of his love must be accompanied by repentance...Imagine running toward the wrong end zone. People who don't accept God's love are doing just that."*

**Fourth, No one is beyond redemption.**

Osborne writes, *"With God's help, it is possible to become a different person – irrespective of past misdeeds or experiences...I realized that God has no deadlines and that some begin to sense his love and presence only after hitting bottom."*

***"We are made right in God's sight when we trust in Jesus Christ to take away our sins. And we all can be saved in this same way, no matter who we are or what we have done."***

**-Romans 3:22**

No matter who we are or what we have done.

***"What this means is that those who become Christians become new persons. They are not the same anymore, for the old life is gone. A new life has begun."***

**-2 Corinthians 5:17**

This newness of life is from God and is available to all people...

These first four "building blocks" are what God has done for us...

...the last two "building blocks" deal with our response to what God has done for us.

**Fifth, we are called to serve rather than be served.**

Osborne writes, *“As I examined the life of Jesus, it became apparent that He came as a servant. The style of leadership I adopted, though far from perfect, was based on His model. Our culture indicates just the opposite – meaning and purpose derive from serving our selves and acquiring material possessions...Life seemed to make more sense when I put God first.”*

***Jesus said, “For even I, the Son of Man, came here not to be served but to serve others, and to give my life as a ransom for many.”***

**-Mark 10:45**

Why do we serve? Out of gratitude for God’s love, redemption, forgiveness, grace...for sending His Son, Jesus Christ...

Lastly, **put God first.**

As Tony Dungy says, *“I Am Second.”*

Having faith...all we do...needs to be motivated by our love of God and our knowledge that He loves us. Faith is putting God first, not others, not possessions, not wants, not self, not pride...but God...putting God first...as Kurt Warner said, after winning the SuperBowl, when asked by a reporter about a particular play...



***“First things first...I want to give praise and credit to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”***

Who are you playing for? Who are you putting first?

Faith is so many things...it involves our everyday lives...our every thought...but it begins with recognizing that everyone is equal in God’s sight, all have fallen short of the glory of God, yet Jesus came to offer us a relationship, to offer us forgiveness...

I want to share Tony Dungy’s words...spoken at a SuperBowl breakfast...



...spoken not long after his son, James, was found dead.

He spoke to the crowd about the effect his son's death had on so many people...and how that led him to understand God's love...

*Dungy spoke, "If God had had a conversation with me and said, 'I can help some people see, I can heal some relationships, I can save some people's lives, I can give some people eternal life, but I have to take your son to do it. You make the choice.' I know how I would have answered that. I would have said, 'No, I'm sorry...as great as all that is...I don't want to do that'...and that's the awesome thing about God...He had that choice and He said 'yes' I'm going to do it...2000 years ago with His son Jesus on the cross..."*

*...and because He said yes, He made the choice that I wouldn't make as a parent, that's paved the way for us to come back into relationship with Him...that's paved the way for us to see changed lives...that's let us know with a certainty that we can live in heaven...that's the benefit I got by accepting Christ into my heart...that's the benefit James got..."*

So...Now what?

Paul writes...

***"Salvation that comes from trusting Christ – which is the message we preach – is already within easy reach. In fact, the Scriptures say, 'The message is close at hand; it is on your lips and in your heart.' For if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. As the Scriptures tell us, 'Anyone who believes in him will not be disappointed.'"***

**- Romans 10:8-11**

## INVITATION

On-Line Bible Study with Wentz and other Eagles –

[www.bible.com](http://www.bible.com)

Click on “Plans”

Search “Wentz”

Click on Study: “*Professional Football on Humility & Surrender*”

Click on “Start This Plan” – Each day video devotional & scripture