

February 12, 2017

"The Greatest Champion"

John Wesley United Methodist Church

I Corinthians 1:18-31

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WOW! I don't think there are enough words to describe last Sunday's Super Bowl game. Wasn't that just...just....euphoric? Tom Brady's incredible performance as he led the team to two fourth-quarter touchdowns, and two, two point conversions. Then, in overtime, with nearly surgical precision, he marched them again right down the field for their fifth Super Bowl championship and another Lombardi trophy. We were witnesses to one of the greatest game ever played. The defense proved why they are the best in the league, Edelman's catch was one for the ages, James White, Amandola, Hogan, Mitchell, Bennett, I can go on and on. Even the normally dour Bill Belichick couldn't refrain from smiling! I even heard he's changing the name of his boat to "Five Rings." Get it! Five Rings. Yes, we are fortunate to have a team like the Patriots here in New England where they have become perennial champions. Truly, we can indeed boast in our football team.

And, too, let's not forget all our other champions. The Celtics and Bruins have each won championships, and our beloved Red Sox have won three World Series in recent years. Who can forget 2004 when the Red Sox finally broke the curse of the Bambino. They were down three games to none in the American League Championship Series. It was the bottom of the 9th inning, and Big Poppi hit a home run to tie the game. Then the Sox went on to beat the Yankees in that game, and the next three games. Then they went on to beat the St. Louis Cardinals in four games straight, for the title. The curse was broken and there was a parade held for the team, the likes of which Boston had never seen. And, again, we boasted in mortal men like David Ortiz, Curt Schilling, Pedro Martinez, and so many more on that team.

Now some of us may not like sports, but perhaps we enjoy movies or music instead. So I'm sure there are plenty of celebrities that might win our affection. In fact, did you know – there are over ninety award shows that air on television. Two weeks ago was the Screen Actors Guild Awards, tonight is the Grammy Awards, in two weeks, the most famous one - the Oscars. And then there's the People's Choice Awards, Tony Awards, MTV Awards, Billboard Music Awards, Country Music Television Awards, the Hall of Fame Awards, Espy Awards... just look them all up. Apparently not only do these entertainers, singers, and sports stars make millions and millions of dollars a year, more money than we could even imagine making in a lifetime, but it seems their material wealth and possessions are not enough. In order to publicize, or might I even use the term 'boast' in their celebrity status, so that they can be

properly revered by the masses, their respective industries have created this series of events where they receive and give each other awards and trophies. Where they walk on red carpets in their very expensive designer gowns and finery. Where they get up and make their prideful speeches, where they espouse their political wisdom, where they give their obligatory thanks to so many people, but very seldom to God.

Now perhaps I am starting to sound overly harsh. And I really don't want to do that because there are so many wonderfully talented people out there - sports stars, actors, singers, even some politicians (maybe), who probably do deserve our accolades for a job well done. Who I thoroughly respect for what they do. But I think we need to put things in perspective. You know, as I was doing my research for this sermon, I discovered something interesting that I want to share with you... the New England Patriots are one of the few teams that have a full time, paid chaplain on their payroll. His name is James Easterby. Now this man is obviously use to being around champions every day. Powerful men with big egos, men making lots and lots of money, and tough men that instill awe, and maybe fear, in the common person. So what does he do? Well, he leads them in Bible studies, on and off field prayers, works coaches' hours in his office counseling players and their wives, throws passes in practice, and sometimes even jumps in on team drills. Since his hire, the Patriots say they are not the same team. Bill Belichick has made him his Special Assistant. Owner Robert Kraft calls Easterby a 'wonderful individual.' Tom Brady says Easterby is one of the main reasons for the Patriots' success. And based on his close and personal relationship with champion players, Easterby put together an interesting video that I want to show you. Let's watch.

<https://vimeo.com/45376981>

You see, that's Easterby's theology. He reminds those champions in the Patriot's locker room, that there is someone greater, someone more awe inspiring than them - the one true champion, Jesus Christ. So let's think about that a minute, and how it pertains to us – who are our champions and what do we worship in our lives today? Have we, like Paul said, let the "wisdom" of the world get the best of us? Do we primarily worship fame, wealth, consumption, glamour and beauty, power and prestige. Do we? Because so much of that really doesn't satisfy. Just look at so many of the rich and famous: all their problems, their addictions, their arrests, the number of suicides, their foolishness, and you can clearly see that despite their fame and fortune, they are fraught with demons that have brought them ruin and destruction. We heard Paul say today, “The message of the cross is foolish to those who are headed for

destruction.” Because the message of the cross has nothing to do with those attributes we so greatly admire in the rich and famous. No, the message of the cross is quite the opposite – love, forgiveness, selflessness, self-sacrifice, obedience to God. Or, perhaps to sum it all up in just one word... it's best described as humility. Yes, the message of the cross is all about humility. Putting God and others before self. And it appears to me that many famous and powerful people have more an attitude of pridefulness than of humility.

Which leads me to the question – what about us? We may not be rich and famous, but do we have an attitude of boastfulness and pride, or do we have that attitude of humility. For that is one quality God wants from us above all else. The apostle James says, “God opposes the proud, but shows favor to the humble.” And look at all the Biblical champions. Look at Moses. The Book of Numbers says that Moses, “was a humble man, more humble than any other.” And yet God did great things through Moses. Or David – a young, simple shepherd, brought in from the fields, to be a great leader and king. God said David is “a man after my own heart.” Mary, a teenager from an obscure village, chosen to be the mother of Jesus. In her Magnificat, she says, “God has been mindful of the humble state of me, his servant. He has scattered those who are proud.” And look at Jesus himself. As Paul says, “Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. Instead, he gave up his divine privileges and took the humble position of being born a human. And he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal’s death on the cross.” Remember, on the night before he was to be crucified, Jesus told his disciples, “the first among you will be last, the one who would be great will be your servant.” And then he got down on his knees and washed their feet.

So can we ever hope to attain that attitude of humility? I think we can, if we just follow some simple wisdom.

First, thank God, often, always. No matter our particular circumstances at the moment, we can all list multiple things for which we should be grateful. Things that we know come from a Source greater than us. Yes, thank God often, for thankfulness is a soil in which pride does not easily grow.

Second, commit each day to follow Christ. Go out and try to walk the extra mile, love others as you love yourself, forgive seventy times seven, turn the other cheek, treat others the way you would want them to treat you. And once you realize how quickly, how often, you’ve failed, you’ll be humbled. But you’ve got to make the commitment.

Third, be ready to accept humiliations. They hurt terribly, but they can help you take an honest look at your actions, your words, your ego. And maybe, humbly change you for the better.

Fourth, do not worry about your status – where you are in the culture’s eyes, or in the eyes of others. There is only one status, that our Lord wants us to be concerned with. And that is the status of proximity to him.

So as we leave here today, let us humbly remember who we are, and Whose we are. And let us boast about one person only - our champion, the greatest champion! Jesus Christ! Amen and amen!