

“Super Sunday”  
Mark 1: 21-28  
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Today is the Sabbath, our Sunday. The fourth commandment reads: “Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy.”<sup>1</sup> It is to be a day of rest. The Lord's Day.

But today is Super Bowl Sunday, the High Holy Day for whole legions of armchair athletes, the most sacred sporting event of a nationwide army of faithful NFL fans. Are you ready for some FOOTBALL?

YES, the New York Giants are playing the New England Patriots in today's Super Bowl in that great tourist destination “beautiful” downtown Indianapolis, Indiana.

The bone-crushing championship conflict between our country's two best teams, the NFC Champs verses the AFC Champs facing off against each other in a contest of hitting, kicking, running, tackling, passing, catching, punting and praising God.

Wait a minute ... "Praising God"?

Don't you just love it when a star player informs a sideline reporter that God is responsible for his team's victory? Not the coaches, not the players, not management, not trainers or owners ... no, GOD is responsible. And how does the star player account for his team's success?

"Thanks be to God," he says. "There's a bunch of guys on this team who really love the Lord."

Some of the players on today's winning Super Bowl team will no doubt give God the glory and thank their Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. But this is really nothing new, and not unique to the NFL.

In today's lesson from the gospel of Mark, there is another huddle, and it takes place in the synagogue in Capernaum, where Jesus is providing the Game Plan for his players.

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<sup>1</sup> Exodus 20: 8

Suddenly a psychotic stranger jumps on the playing field ... not unlike a possessed, raving football fan ...

He gets right in Jesus' face, and he screeches,

"What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are," he thunders, "the Holy One of God."

Jesus reprimands and rebukes the demon, saying,

"Be silent, and come out of him!" <sup>2</sup>

And the unclean spirit, convulsing the man and crying with a loud voice, comes popping out like a fumbled football. Jesus exudes such authority that even demons obey instantly. Jesus possesses such poise that even evil forces know that he is the Holy One of God. Jesus is pumped up with such power that even unclean spirits know that his arrival on the field marks the end of the Super Bowl for them, the end of their season of domination over men and women.

Jesus, in other words, takes control of the mayhem.

There's no doubt about the mayhem today. Can you comprehend that the average cost of a 30 second commercial this year is \$3.5 million dollars. The Super Bowl hype has been going on now for two weeks. Who is the better quarterback, Tom Brady or Eli Manning? Will New England's tight end Rob Gronkowski be able to play? And if he doesn't will that make any difference? And how ironic that they're playing in the house that Payton's built; he is there watching his little brother maybe win his second Super Bowl not knowing if he will ever play football again.

There's mayhem in the synagogue, too. A man staggers into the synagogue like a fanatic fan running across midfield. Jesus takes control. In the center of the huddle, Jesus calls the play: he calls for a two-point conversion designed to give victory to this demented fan.

Point one: Be silent.

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<sup>2</sup> Mark 1: 24-25

Point two: Come out of him.

This is a solid strategy for any player in any huddle, on or off the field. A conversion is a life-changing and game-winning event, and whether you are talking about that conversion which first calls you to become a committed disciple of Jesus Christ, or the conversion which later calls you to reorder your priorities, you probably need to do two things.

First, be quiet -- and listen to the authoritative voice of God.

Second, "Come out of him" -- that is, break free, let go, get rid of something. Something's always got to give.

Be silent, and come out of him; a two-point conversion. It's a game-winning call.

So how do we execute what the playbook lays out for us? The command to be silent and listen is no bush-league challenge. So often in prayer we ask for what we want -- whether it's victory for our favorite team, finding a way to balance this year's church budget, or a physical healing from our latest ache, pain, or disease.

We see players kneeling on the sidelines praying that the opposing team's field goal kicker misses the last-second winning field goal, which raises the question of whether it's really very Christian to pray for somebody to miss a kick?

I remember some years back when the University of Oklahoma football team beat archrival Texas in overtime, the Oklahoma coach declared on ABC-TV that "This was Jesus Christ working through my players."

Say, what? You mean the Lord Jesus turned his back on Texas? That somehow God's ears were tuned only to the pious petitions of the Oklahoma fans?

Author Kathleen Norris used to play a game with elementary-school children in which she would make a deal with them. "First you get to make noise," she would bargain, "and then you'll make silence."

The time of noise was always predictably chaotic -- shouting, pounding and stomping, like a football team exploding out of a locker room. But the period of silence that followed was unexpectedly passionate and creative.

When the children were asked to write about it, reflects Norris, "their images often had a depth and maturity that was unlike anything else they wrote."

One boy discovered that "Silence is a tree spreading its branches to the sun."

A third-grader's poem turned into a prayer: "Silence is spiders spinning their webs; it's like a silkworm making its silk. Lord, help me to know when to be silent."

And a little girl offered a gem of spiritual wisdom that Norris finds herself returning to when her life becomes too noisy and distracting:

"Silence reminds me to take my soul with me wherever I go." <sup>3</sup>

When we follow the command of Jesus to be silent, we spread our branches to the sun and soak up the light of God's love, forgiveness and peace.

When we hear God's still, small voice, we are like silkworms spinning the silk of a sanctified life.

When we listen for the guidance of the Lord -- really listen, instead of telling the Almighty all about what we are convinced we need to achieve -- we rediscover that our most precious treasure is the God-breathed soul that each of us has from the very beginning of life, a soul that we really should remember to take with us into all the splendid surprises of each day.

You won't hear this kind of wisdom during all the noise of all the

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<sup>3</sup> Kathleen Norris, *Amazing Grace*, p. 17

commentators at today's Super Bowl. Such insight requires a certain amount of simplicity ... and silence.

Jesus goes on to say, "Come out of him!" -- Meaning break free, let go, get rid of something. Something's got to give if you're going to get to where Jesus wants you to go.

One thing we should let go of is how we feel toward people outside the church, people unlike ourselves, people on "other teams."

There's a lot of love for those within our community of faith especially those who look, think, and act like us, and that's a wonderful thing, but if we're really honest with ourselves, we'll discover that what often makes a group a group is that we have a common "enemy."

Think about it. What is motivating each Super Bowl team today is more than just brotherly love between teammates who respect each other, work well together, and believe in the same game plan? There is also a deep, desperate, driving desire once again to dominate and crush the other team.

Duke fans who love each other – hate the University of North Carolina, closer to home there isn't much love between the Bears and the Green Bay Packers, and even closer to home – not much love between the Chicago White Sox and that team on the North side of Chicago called the Cubs.

This is true, isn't it? Nothing puts us in an "Onward, Christian Soldiers" mode faster than a threat to the health and future of our church. Our blood starts rushing, our wrath starts rising, and our passion starts to push us into a rampage of righteousness.

But as natural as this burst of aggression is, it doesn't seem to be terribly Christ-centered. After all, our Lord is the one who broke tradition by breaking bread with sinners, who loved the one lost sheep as much as the 99 in the fold, and who came to call "not the righteous but sinners."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Mark 2:17.

Jesus commands, "Come out of him!" -- Meaning break free, let go, get rid of something. Break free of the natural desire to beat your enemies into submission. Better to submit yourself to God, and to let your good works show the world the awesome power of the Christian life.

Let go of your craving for worldly success, a hunger for food that can never truly satisfy. Better to feast on Scripture and the still, small voice of God, and be filled by the satisfaction of a sanctified life.

Get rid of the competitive spirit that forces people to end up as winners or losers, the victors or the vanquished. It is better to welcome the Holy Spirit, who wants everyone to win by discovering and accepting the salvation of our gracious God.

As we gather around the table today this Sunday, let us feast on the knowledge that we are all God's beloved and forgiven people; let us be reminded that Jesus came that we might have life; and that he is calling us to take time to be silent; and to come out, to break free, to let go, submit ourselves, and to show forth His grace and goodness.

Today is Sunday – The Sabbath – A Day of rest – the Lord's Day!

It is a Super Sunday, not because later today the Super Bowl is played, but because on this Sabbath day, as we celebrate the sacrament of Holy Communion, we remember God's supreme love for us in the gift of His beloved son, Jesus the Christ, who is our Lord and Savior.

**Amen!**