

Life Happens For You (1 Cor. 2:1-10)

February 5, 2017

I am a stalwart, unapologetic fan of the New England Patriots. Come kick-off time at 6:30 this evening, I will be glued to the screen to see what happens this Super Bowl. Like many fans, I have been monitoring the Super Bowl news this past week leading up to the Big Day. You may think I'm crazy and I don't argue with you. My spouse calls it the Stupid Bowl or sometimes the Stupor Bowl. The story-lines from Super Bowl Week admittedly are *insipid*. Is quarterback Tom Brady really on a Revenge Tour because of Deflategate? Does Marshall Faulk *really* believe his team lost to the Patriots because they cheated 13 years ago? Is it even in NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell's job description to tell the truth about decisions he makes?

Yeah, I admit it. You have to be a FANatic to even begin to care.

Nonetheless, I found myself drawn this week to the almost unnoticed stories of players who are simply glad to be there in Houston for Super Bowl LI. By some freak of DNA, sports culture, hard work and extraordinary luck, these gentlemen (I use the word 'gentlemen' with some caution) find themselves in the limelight doing something they love. It won't last. They will get measured by blatantly cruel standards of success or failure, but here they are and they are glad. Past or future, win or lose, fame or infamy, they get to be here.

Yes, I'm sure being part of the Super Bowl is exciting. But what occurs to me is that some folks simply have the capacity to be glad. We assume that to be glad one has to win, or be noticed or get paid a lot or have an unblemished reputation. Let's take it a little deeper. We assume that unless life provides us with what we hope and dream for, then there isn't much reason to be glad. If there is pain or loss or emptiness or fear – and how many of us know nothing of these things? – then there is no reason to be glad. If life is unjust, disappointing, threatening.....how should you be glad?

I remember being called out late one Saturday evening at a former church, to go to the hospital because one of my parishioners was dying. She was in her late 90's and I didn't know her very well. Hadn't even known she was ill. What I did know is that she was Scots-Irish immigrant who came to the US without a dollar to her name and ended up in our city, living at the old YWCA. It was the 1920's, she took a secretarial course, got a job with the old WBZ radio station in tough Depression times. Once she'd been there at WBZ for a while and got to know the technological miracle that was radio in those days, she convinced her bosses to let her try something. Five evenings a week, from a wooden shack on the rooftop of a local hotel, she broadcast bedtime stories for kids, especially for kids who were like her, new to the country. She never married. These kids were her kids. For more than thirty years she broadcast to her kids.

Well, that night at the hospital the doctor told me she couldn't live long. She was so riddled with cancer that her organs were shutting down. But she did live a while, days then weeks. Lived on air, it seemed. Long enough while I was there to see a bunch of folks come in to her bedside and thank her for those long ago radio broadcasts that helped them go to sleep at night with a sense that somebody noticed kids. Men, women in their 70's and 80's came and thanked her with tears in their eyes. At the end she told a few of us by her bed that she'd done her radio broadcast because it seemed worth doing and made her happy.

I don't know what seems worth doing to you or what makes you happy. I do know this. Life happens **for** you, not **to** you. We have a chance to be glad at life, not because life brings us our dreams, but because all that is life can be embraced. Your success, your failure, your reaching out and your body shutting down. I know that some of you have faced hard things in your life. I am aware that some of you are facing hard things right now. I'm not going to tell you that the glass is half-full – sometimes the glass feels all-empty.

Listen anyway. Writer Jeff Foster has said: *If I am given only one more day, let it be this day, the only one I have ever known, and let me love it...* {The Way of Rest, p. 153}. Yes, this day even though it may feel like you are living only on air. This day of handling "the stuff." And this day of making choices you really would rather not make. This day of "taking on." And this day of "letting go." Even this day of "Oh, whatever." This day **is** you. It holds you. It asks only your noticing, your attention, your willingness to be wholly in it.

"What no eye has seen," says Paul in the scripture this morning, "nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, God has prepared for us..." Who hears these words, stands in a place of immense curiosity, never knowing quite what is to come. Today you may see God in the eyes of a stranger, heaven in a broken dish!

Be glad then! Let this be the day that is embraced – **by you**. How else would you notice what God has in mind for you?

Amen