

**Message Delivered at Christ Church
The Weekend of February 6th & 7th
TEXTS: Isaiah 6:1-8; Luke 5:1-11
Delivered by Paul A. Johnson**

If you don't know it, there's a football game on TV tonight. It's called the Super Bowl...maybe you've heard of it. I don't know about you, but I'm going to watch at least some of it. I hope it's a good game.

It's the Colts vs. the Saints. Now the quarterback for the Colts is Peyton Manning. He's probably the best in the business. He's big; he's strong; he's smart. He's as close to an old-time, call-your-own-plays kind of quarterback there is in the game today. In the last ten years, the Colts have won more football games than any other team. Tonight, they'll try to win their third Super Bowl and second in four years.

The Saints are in their first Super Bowl. And if ever there was a sports story to make you feel good, it's the Saints playing in the big game. We all know what happened in New Orleans four-and-a-half years ago. I spent a little time there at the end of last year, and I'll tell you that it is still a devastated city. They love their Saints, and this is more than a game to them. Their quarterback is a guy named Drew Brees, and he's probably the second best in the business. And if you're interested in a little Super Bowl trivia that you probably won't get on the six-and-a-half hour long pregame show this afternoon...Drew Brees is an Episcopalian.

Neither team is known for their defense, and so the odds are that this one will be a shootout.

In fact, Vegas says the odds are 6-1 that more than eighty-one points will be scored in this game. Also, the odds are 4 to 1 that Indianapolis will win by four points or fewer. The odds are 5 to 1 that the first score of the game will be a New Orleans field goal. The odds are 7 to 1 that if Indianapolis is ahead at halftime, New Orleans can come back and win the game; but the odds are 7 to 2 that if New Orleans is ahead at halftime, Indianapolis can come back and win the game. You can bet on who wins; you can bet on who scores first; who scores last; who will be the MVP. Now follow this one closely...you can bet on whether the kicker for the Colts will have more field goals than the punter for the Colts will have punts. You can even bet on who wins the coin toss. My hunch on that one is that the odds are about 50/50.

About \$10 billion...almost fifteen times more than we've given to relief of the earthquake in Haiti...will be bet on the Super Bowl...99% of it illegally. Today will be a very long day for the 7.5 million Americans who are addicted to gambling.

Now a football game is sixty minutes long. But the game, itself, will probably be on television for three hours. We get hungry watching all that football because the only day of the year we consume more food than we do on Super Bowl Sunday is Thanksgiving Day.

So while we're munching on our low-fat yogurt and fresh fruit, here's how they're going to fill up those extra 120 minutes...

First of all, about midway through the game, Pete Townsend and the rest of the Who are going to perform the halftime show. (Kids, the Who are a band whose last great album [we called them "albums" back then] came out thirty years ago.) I kinda hope they sing "My Generation" ...don't you?

But mostly, the rest of the time will be taken up by commercials. All sorts of businesses are spending between \$2.5 and \$2.8 million to buy thirty seconds worth of ad time—plus

undoubtedly millions more to create the ads—hoping that when the game stops and the commercials come on we'll stay in the room and decide that a certain kind of cola really is the best kind of cola, especially when it chases a certain kind of corn chip while we're eating a certain fast food restaurant's hamburger. And don't ever say I don't have my principles...at \$84,000 a second, I'm not mentioning the name of any corporation in this sermon unless they give Christ Church a piece of the pie!

And estimates are that at some point during the evening, 140 million Americans will watch. 140 million Americans—45% of the entire population of the United States--will gather at their televisions and watch other people do something. On Thanksgiving Day we do something...we gather and share a meal; on Christmas Day we do something...we exchange gifts; on 4th of July we do something...we wave flags; on Memorial Day we remember those who died for our nation and mark the beginning of summer at the pool; on Labor Day a lot of us are getting the kids ready to start school, and that's certainly doing something. But Super Bowl Sunday is a day ordered around watching other people do something. It's the biggest spectator event of the year, and 140 million of us will spectate.

You got to hand it to the NFL...they are brilliant marketers. They have created a civic holiday around their sport and the only things they want us to do is watch.

So it's a special day in our nation. And I can't quite explain why I'm going to do what I am now going to do. I don't know whether it was the Spirit moving, or just my own thinking. But the rest of this message time is going to be more of a prayer than a talk. Think of it as a Super Bowl Sunday prayer...

Good morning, Lord. Today is Super Bowl Sunday, and this morning we're here in this warm space to worship you and say our prayers.

We pray that when we show up to work tomorrow; or when we show up for school if it happens; or when we take care of the things we have to do at home, and with our kids, or for our parents, or friends; and we pray that when we show up to the party this evening...that we keep our eyes open to see your presence. We know, Lord, that you worshiped in the synagogue. The story we read a couple weeks ago told us that you did. But you didn't spend all your time there. You didn't even spend most of your time there. Instead, you showed up where people live and work and play. And tonight you'll show up, too. So help us to keep our eyes open for your presence, and like the people in this story we read this morning, keep our ears open to hear your word. Give us eager hearts. Make us as passionate for you as the people in New Orleans are for the Saints, and the people in Indianapolis are for the Colts. Help us to live with expectation so that we crush upon you the way the crowd did at the side of that lake.

We pray for the grace to listen to this story closely this morning. So there's old Peter; in from a hard night at work; not some scholar or priest or rabbi, but a guy doing a job. He smells like fish; he's got so much dirt under his fingernails that it will never come out. I betcha he swore like a sailor. Apparently, Lord, the fish weren't running that night. He had a bad night. He didn't seem to be accomplishing very much except what most of us accomplish...showing up, doing his job, hoping that what's next is better than what came before...but still, left with empty nets. Sometimes it seems like that...nothing but empty nets. When that happens and we're in a good place, we simply say that we failed. But sometimes more sinister forces creep

into our souls that whisper to us that we're failures...and there's a big difference between the two...

But you never see us the way the world sees us. Help us to know that deep in our spirits. You didn't with Isaiah; you didn't with Peter; and you don't with us.

You should know that seems an incredible miracle to us. There are a few of us human beings who think more of ourselves than we ought to, but most of us know that we got our dark spots; most of us even know we have dark spots we don't even know we have. We understand Peter's words..."Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful person." In the quiet of our heart—or maybe even in the presence of another—we've said them to you more than once.

But you don't go away. You stay. And you don't just stay, **you actually ask us to help.** You asked it of Peter...right here in this story. In fact, you **demand** that we help. It's Super Bowl weekend, so I'll say it...you put **us** in the game. You call us to help you bring in your kingdom. You know, we pray all the time "your kingdom come; your will be done; on earth as it is in heaven." And you expect us to help make that prayer alive, and give us your Spirit that we might do so. We don't get to just watch; and following you isn't a spectator sport; and no one gets to stand in for us, do they...?

This is another miracle, Lord, how you do not patronize us. You don't say "leave it to the experts" or "let the professionals handle this one." And you don't just hold our hand and say "There, there..." Instead, you say "don't be afraid; come on; let's go; we got work to do; we got some fishing to get done." It's a great line you give to Peter here..."From now on, you will be catching people." It's actually quite clever, if I may say so. A more literal translation is "from now on, you will bring 'em back alive." We've made it more polite—"catch people"—(and why we always want to make things more polite is something worth talking with you about at another time because you, certainly, were not polite) but it sure is powerful in an earthy sort of way to bring others back alive the same way you've brought us back alive, and that you've asked us to help; that you demand that we help; that you've set it up that it is necessary to our own salvation that we help you bring your salvation.

So we pray, today, for a little bit of Peter's courage—or maybe it's foolishness. You told him to go into the deep water, and he did it. Twice...once with the fish, and once to follow you. He just did it. You told him to do it, and he did. Two things, Lord...He didn't know what would happen, and deep water is dangerous. So we pray for conversion like Peter's, and that you protect us from making an idol of either certainty or safety.

You know, Lord, we really do want to do your will. I want to do your will. The people of Christ Church want to do your will. All the faithful everywhere want to do your will. I've never met a disciple anywhere who doesn't want to do your will.

But we're tempted to stay on the shore. We get afraid sometimes; and sometimes we just get precious. We wait for certainty about your call, and too often describe our caution as "discernment." We're tempted to believe that we can figure out which way your Spirit is blowing by studying the wind rather than getting in the middle of the breeze. But I'm not convinced that's really the way it works. I mean...correct me if I'm mistaken here...fear is just a part of life; it's just a feeling, and you're encouraging us here that it need not determine our behavior; and I don't think we verify your call by hanging back and waiting on the shore. I don't think we catch fish—whatever that looks like in our own lives--by looking at them, or thinking about it, or waiting for the time to be exactly right. How can we help you change the world—and transform our own lives---by staying on the couch...I mean, sitting on the shore? I think, instead, we do it

by getting in our boats, shoving off into deep water, and discovering for ourselves what you're already up to.

You know, there are tons of things we do everyday unsure of whether they are what you intend for us. So I wonder why we wait for certainty about your call to us when it comes to things like giving more away; or making friends with the poor, or those in prison, or visiting a sick friend; or extending our hand in welcome to someone we don't know? We do lots of things everyday unsure of whether you are calling us to do them...and that's okay. But when it comes to the dangerous, deep water things...why do we wait to be certain, or to make sure everything is perfect and just right?

I guess we all really **do** need to hear "do not be afraid."

So like Isaiah, help us to say "Here I am; send me." And like Peter, give us the grace to put out into deep water and let down our nets; to just do it...maybe we'll catch something; maybe we won't. But at least we will have given ourselves a chance to get in your way and be part of what you're doing, and whenever that happens you smile and bless. And give us eyes to see that if you issued the call to Peter's friends as much as you did to him, that you're not asking us to follow you alone. We get to do it together...

Protect us, Lord, from safety. That's a crazy petition for sure. But I sometimes wonder whether it isn't a prayer we need to pray more often.

And thank you for how you say "go." You said it to Abraham; and Moses; and Joshua; and Ruth; and Samuel; and Isaiah; and Jeremiah; and Ezekiel; and Mary; and Paul; and Peter. And you don't just say it to the people in scripture or someone else. You say it to us. And we're grateful you do...even though we're just folk like Peter: no expert; no scholar; and smelling like fish...silly sinful human beings, and afraid. But you make butterflies out of caterpillars; penicillin out of moldy cheese; apostles out of fishermen...so surely you make us your disciples...so give us the grace—with our sisters and brothers--to get up and go.

Now, there's a game this afternoon, Lord. If we're going to watch it, inspire us to watch it as you would...that if we are watching it with others it's because you have placed us there; to see you in the those gathered at the party or in the bar, befriending not those who make us comfortable but those who don't; to give away to somebody who needs it as much money as we put down on all those squares that people do at Super Bowl parties, and to look them in the eye when we do so; to remember those who go hungry when we eat that next nacho; to remember those who are cold when we hear how warm it is in Miami; to comfort those who feel like they are losers in something much bigger than a football game...and then, get us off of that couch. Because you didn't come so that we could watch. You came so that we could play. And you didn't come so that we could be comfortable on the shore. You came so that we would go out into deep waters.

Amen.