

## MERIDIAN STREET UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

### Got Game?

2 Corinthians 4:16-18

Though the person playing the center position on a football team is rarely credited for winning a game, he may indeed be blamed for losing a game. A bad snap has been blamed for many a loss. The snap is essential to the game. More than once a bad snap has cost a team dearly.

It is the quarterback and the receivers who usually get all the public's attention. A rare exception to that truth took place on January 21<sup>st</sup> of this year, when the center for the Colts, Jeff Saturday, assisted the Colts in winning the AFC Championship game. Saturday recovered a fumble from one of his teammates in the end zone and scored a touchdown. The center's main job is to snap the ball to the quarterback and then protect either the quarterback or another ball carrier. It is not the job of the center to score touchdowns. Yet, Jeff Saturday did just that. It may never happen to him again, but it was glorious in that moment. He easily could have missed the opportunity altogether. It was not his job to score that touchdown, but it was an opportunity that he did not let pass him by. Jeff Saturday's Got Game.

The center is essential to a football team just as our center is essential to living out our faith. The center is that place at the core of our being where we understand who we are and whose we are.

"Got Game?" is an American slang and it has several meanings, but I use the phrase this morning as a short cut way of saying bringing your absolute best to the field or the court or more importantly to life. Got Game Meridian Street?

Author Thomas Moore writes in his book, *Care of the Soul*, "We must look inside ourselves to find our connection with God, our own spirituality." Moore goes on to say that we are called to rekindle our own internal grace with the Creator.

I love that concept. At the core of our being, our center, we rekindle our internal grace with the Creator. The grace is always there. God's grace is our essence. God's grace is a renewable resource within us. Centering in God's grace becomes our goal for living. Giving the grace within us voice and power shapes our words and our actions. However, we all know that we stray from our center on a regular basis. We often resort to reactions that are not thought through or reflect the person we want to become. Reactions to life that may use our reason or emotion, but lack soul.

At the core of our being is our true self. At the core of our being we find the grace of God that shapes and defines us. At our center is our soul. It is at the center that we encounter the Divine within us and develop our relationship with the sacred.

I was acquainted with a Psychologist in Kansas named Stephen Amos. Dr. Amos wrote a book entitled, *Personal Growth through Spirit Stones*. According to Dr. Amos, who you are in this world is largely a product of who you think you are. If you believe that you are present on this planet at this time for a purpose, you owe it to yourself to take time out to learn just what that special purpose might be. In so doing, you align your life with that task or higher purpose and toward fulfilling yourself as a deeper spiritual being. Movement toward this kind of discovery requires meditation and prayer.

Dr. Amos among many others stresses the importance of taking time and making space to focus on our center, our core. When we have experienced pain in life, this focus encourages healing, where we have known rejection, this focus encourages belonging. When we grieve loss, this focus encourages hope. It is up to each one of us to encounter God's healing presence as a balm to quiet and rejuvenate our soul.

Your spiritual center is essential to your living. It is at our center that we find the strength to live out our faith when life brings us difficulty, pain or rejection. It is by developing our center that we can bring our best self to difficult life situations. It is by God's grace that we are able to bring our best self even when we are grieving a devastating loss, or moving beyond a breach in a relationship, or picking up the pieces after a significant disappointment. Engaging God's grace at our center is essential to following in the steps of Jesus Christ.

One of my favorite expressions of this truth was written by Marianne Williamson. She writes, "Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, and fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small doesn't serve the world. There's nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine. We are born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It's not just in some of us, it's in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others."

You are fabulous! God has already made that your truth. Yours is a life of great meaning. Our strength is rooted at the core of our being in our relationship with God through Christ. Jesus had a pattern of going off by himself for reflection and prayer. He did so to nurture his center so that he could remain strong in his faith in the face of his many challenges. Focusing on our center can renew us day by day to be God's witness for justice, peace and hope in our personal life, within the church and within the community.

The world can be a harsh place. Thanks be to God who lives at the core of our being and enables us to become full to overflowing with grace. Grace is our gift. We have yet to fully realize its purpose in our lives.

In the second letter to the Church in Corinth, the apostle Paul writes the community and shares these words, “Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.”

Our center is the essence of our being. We are being renewed day by day by God’s presence within us. Our external realities do not define us, it is that which is alive within in us that shapes the person we are becoming. It is that essence that shines through us as we make split second decisions and face life’s challenges.

In the passage read this morning, Joseph who had been sold into slavery by his brothers finds himself in the position of holding great power over the lives of his brothers. Joseph brings his best self to the situation and instead of offering them what they deserve, he offers them grace. The love of God shines through him as he offers them a place to live and food to eat. Joseph’s got game! There is power at our center.

I am sure that you have heard of Wesley Autry, the 50-year-old construction worker in New York who threw himself on the subway tracks to save a stranger’s life. Autry was recognized by the President of the United States in his State of the Union Speech. When asked about the incident, Mr. Autry said, “I had to make a split (second) decision... I did what I felt was right.” (*New York Times* January 3, 2007) In that moment, Mr. Autry was fully connected to his center. He was standing safe and sound with his two young daughters on the train platform and he leapt onto the tracks in the path of an oncoming train to protect a complete stranger. Wesley Autry’s got game! There is power at our center.

You may not have heard about a homeless man in Detroit, Charles Moore, who discovered savings bonds in the trash last summer. Moore, who was looking through a dumpster searching for bottle returns, came upon a man’s jacket. The jacket contained 31 savings’ bonds with a face value of \$8,900.00 and a potential of \$21,000.00. Certainly, these bonds could make a huge difference in Moore’s life, but he began the process to seek out the rightful owner of the bonds and Moore returned them. (*Detroit News*) Charles Moore’s got game. In spite of his own significant challenges, he did the right thing. There is power at our center.

The stories of neighbor helping neighbor and strangers helping each other are already surfacing from the devastating storms in Florida this weekend. These are stories of ordinary people, in extraordinary circumstances, bringing their best self to the situation. These people have got game! There is power at our center.

Certainly we are all aware of the Amish Community in Nickel Mines, Pennsylvania. After the murder of five young girls in a one room school house and the injury of five others, the community began gathering food, raising money and lifting prayers to offer support to the family of the murderer.

“It’s the love, the forgiveness, the heartfelt forgiveness they have toward the family. I broke down and cried seeing it displayed,” said (Bruce) Porter (a fire department Chaplin). *USA Today* 10/06/2006

That power in that Amish community grows from its center both individually and collectively. There is power at our center.

According to Ronald Rolheiser in his book, *The Holy Longing*, “What we see outside of ourselves is very much colored by what is, first of all, inside us.” Rolheiser goes on to say, “The Gospels would essentially agree that (the) assessment, spiritual health is 90% about honesty.”

We know who we are at our center. We understand at our core of our being that we are called to be disciples of Christ, to live out our best self as we encounter the challenges in our lives. When we’ve got game, we are truly connected to the Divine, intentional with our words and actions and rooted in honesty with Christ, ourselves and others.

You and I, we’ve got game. Granted, some days better than others, but we can all think of a time when we brought our best to a situation. Each and every day is an opportunity to be in prayer, to be honest with ourselves and to allow the grace of God to shine through us.

We are fabulous! Not by our own doing, but by God’s grace. We are called to shine! We are called to bring our best to this day and tomorrow and the day after. We are called to be honest about our hurts and our hopes. We are called to be honest about our insecurities and our successes. We are called to honest about the person we are in this moment and the person we yearn to become.

The centers will be important to the football game this evening. They may not win the game, but they will have significant influence. It is my guess that they will bring their best to the game today. What about you? Are you bringing your best to this day? I ask not to induce guilt! I ask only in hopes that you and I will be honest with God and self. This is a perfect day for us to encounter the grace of God within us and allow that grace to shine through us. This is the perfect day to reconnect with the Divine, allow our soul to be rejuvenated and be the fabulous person God envisions us to be.