

## God's Mulligan Moment - And There's an Eagle in it For You

Isaiah 40:21-31; Mark 1:29-39; Romans 7:14 – 8:4

Sunday, January 29, 2012

Thomas Merton, the Christian writer, put the heart of the Christian faith, its promise . . . the promise of Jesus's teaching, and the promise of the Prophet Isaiah, in these words . . . For God's sake . . . try again.

Merton said . . . The thing to do when you have made a mistake is not to give up . . . or start something new . . . but to start over again, and try, for the love of God, to do it well.

This morning I'd like to put that message in these words . . . Live in the grace and the power of God's Mulligan moments. Live in the power of God's word to God's people in Jesus Christ - the good news - that though we sin, and though we stumble, and though we suffer, and fail and fall, we are safe in God's love.

Now be clear – I know I am using the language of golf. But I'm pretty sure this sermon is not the product of a preacher's passion for golf getting the better of him in the middle of winter. My passion for golf does get the better of me from time to time, I admit it. Some people see the snow covered hills of a golf course, and I see them every day off Eastman Avenue, and many people think . . . cross country skiing, or snowmobiling . . . and I think . . . how long, how long, how long 'til spring.

And . . . yes . . . sometimes . . . golfers do see golf as a parable of life . . . of the Christian life. It is after all a game played in and with nature . . . You have to play the ball . . . as you have to play life . . . where it lies. And - you play the game best by following the rules.

And – like life - most of all - While you play against the course, the world, against nature, and with and against other people, always, always, always the biggest challenge is dealing with yourself.

In golf . . . as in the Christian life . . . there can be . . . a mulligan moment . . . A Mulligan, a do over. In golf, it's the chance, usually just once in each round, where money isn't what matters, when you get to do your first shot over, to make a new beginning. To try again.

This morning, I want to make the case, that this morning, and every Sunday morning, and, in truth, the morning of every new day, is God's offer in the sunrise, and in the risen Son, of a Mulligan moment for us.

Tell me . . . no . . . just ask yourself . . . what has been, what is now, the need in your life . . . for a mulligan . . . for the chance, or chances, the opportunity . . . to do something over, to try again? To make right a wrong you've done. Or to do the right you wish you'd done? Do you need a mulligan in your life?

Let us pray . . .

Lord . . . on this new Sunday, as we celebrate anew the life, death and resurrection and living spirit of Jesus Christ, may the words of my mouth, and the meditations, the thoughts, of these your loving and faithful people, be acceptable in your sight, our strength and our hope. Amen.

This moment, every week, is my mulligan moment in life. This moment, this is my play it over opportunity. It's my . . . you get to try it again advantage in life. Here I confess my sins and find God's amazing grace. This true all the more when we come to the Lord's Table, to Communion . . . as we will next Sunday.

The Lord's Table, the Holy Meal, is our reminder, it is a declaration of our faith in God's promise . . . and in the power and truth of Christ's life. "As often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you show the Lord's death, 'til he come." Not forever death, not dead ends . . . but new beginnings . . . that's the message of our faith.

Forgiveness and healing are the keys here. It is the powerful message of Jesus' life in the opening passages of Mark. But it is also the powerful truth at work in our lives.

And . . . it is the offer of Christ's life . . . The invitation of his table, too . . . Come . . . new beginnings . . . here. No worth of ours expected, no price charged. But freely offered here . . . God's love, forgiving, life giving, love . . . .

It was the heart of the prophet Isaiah's message to the Hebrew people . . . in their faithlessness, in their suffering from their faithlessness. A nation destroyed, in exile in a foreign land. And then - God's mulligan moment – Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to her. Have you not known, have you not heard, has it not been told you from the Beginning . . . The lord is the everlasting God; he gives power to the faint. Those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles . . . .

And – it all happened again. And the people of Israel lost their way again. The law of God could be bent in too many ways - even as we can bend the law. So God so loved the world that God gave to his God's self in the life of Jesus Christ – the law of life alive, dwelling with us, and giving to us the living truth of God's forever love.

This was the heart and soul of Jesus life and ministry . . . In a sense I suppose, we could say, in a golfer's language – Jesus is God's Mulligan moment for humankind . . . . He came, he comes to us still, to proclaim and to demonstrate the healing power of God's love.

The message is up front and clear . . . from the beginning. It is a point in telling the story of Jesus' life that the writer of the gospel of Mark does not want us to miss. A man of unclean spirit . . . Jesus heals. And . . . Who of us does not deal with some demons, some hurt we can't be done with . . . . Some failure that we can't forget, some fear we can't quite manage, Some worry that robs us of peace of mind . . . .

A woman laid low by disease . . . as we often are . . . and Jesus proclaims the good news, the best of news. You are healed. And – that - for us, day by day, week after week, in the middle of life, and at the end of it is God . . . Is God's love . . . God's healing, forgiving, new life giving love.

You know your own need to know this truth . . . and to celebrate it over and over and over again. That life is about brokenness . . . and healing. About failures . . . and new beginnings . . . About misses . . . and trying again . . . About . . . Mulligans . . . .

We say it in the Sacrament – here . . . as Christ said it before . . . This is my body, broken for you, but it's the bread of new life . . . this is my blood, shed . . . For the forgiveness of sins . . . for the promise of healing, for new beginning. This do in remembrance . . . .

Scott Peck, the psychiatrist and Christian spiritual writer, author of *The Road Less Traveled*, has also written - *Golf and the Spirit . . . Lessons for the Journey . . .* and there he puts the message of Christ's life – in these practical terms . . . .

He writes: In the Christian life we need to empty ourselves over and over and over again, in order to be filled with the spirit of Christ. So- In life we need . . .

- To be attentive to the hazards ahead, but empty of fear of them- don't see the sand traps.
- Strive to do our best, but empty ourselves of concern with our score. God doesn't keep score.
- Learn from every mistake, but empty ourselves of any self-hatred for our Imperfections – only the next shot counts. He is . . . life's mulligan moment . . . life's do over promise . . .

Isaiah said it . . . Comfort, comfort my people says your God. Her penalty is paid . . . Your god gives power to the faint . . . Those who wait for the Lord . . . shall renew their strength . . . . They shall mount up with wings like eagles . . . .

Here . . . here . . . week after week - we celebrate this truth . . . . In a sense . . . soul deep sense . . . we tee it up again . . . on this first day, this resurrection day . . . of every new week. We confess our failures and hear the words of God's pardon and blessing.

In the hope and prayer . . . that day by day . . . we will see God's will and way for us more clearly, love God more dearly, and follow his way in Christ more nearly . . . .

The power of this message . . . its deepest impact in our lives . . . we will know, really know, when in our lives . . . we do for others what has been done for us . . . done for us here. When we become messengers of the mulligan Amazing Grace promise of life in Christ . . . .

It was the wonder and hope and promise and final disappointment of what was called the Jubilee Project. Based on the Biblical idea of a year of Jubilee, when all debts are forgiven, it was suggested some years ago - It was a simple idea - for the richest nations in the world . . . to forgive the debt of the poorest nations in the world.

It is the idea of forgiving a debt we probably cannot ever collect, of trying to heal sick and starving people of the world, the least and last, to lift off of them the impossible weight of a sickness, maybe call it sin, of which they cannot otherwise ever be free.

To say . . . what Isaiah said . . . Comfort, comfort my people says your God . . . Her penalty is paid . . . Those who wait for the Lord . . . shall renew their strength . . . They shall mount up with wings like eagles . . . .

The idea was to do what Jesus did . . . in this life . . . for us . . . all. And – it never happened – and now those unpaid debts are like shackles on the world's economy.

How strange. Yet we practice this truth all the time if we are good parents. We see our children fall and we pick them up, hug them, and send them off to try again, to fall or fail, but to be forgiven and given encouragement to keep on trying, mulligan moments to learn how best to live – beyond falls and mistakes.

I have no expertise in economics, but, I fail to understand why something like this – this forgiveness of debt that cannot be repaid, would not be very good for our society and our economy.

I mean - what possible good is there in foreclosing on a house that, through no fault of his or her own, the owner is totally underwater – owing far more than their house is worth - because - because of the actions of persons in financial institutions who knowingly took huge risks and made huge profits, and left everyone else holding the bag?

Why not a mulligan moment for mortgages . . . .?

In our personal lives for sure, we having been given a Mulligan moment for our lives in Christ . . . have every reason to want to grant to others their own do overs, try again, mulligan moments.

This is our mulligan moment . . . in Christ . . . Is it a mulligan moment . . . Of forgiveness, of grace, of mercy, of new life that we can offer to the world . . . in Christ's name?

Should we not just sing about Amazing Grace, but live it. I once was lost, but now am found. Was blind but now I see – I see – God's call to me - to live with the mulligans God gives me, and to give the mulligans of amazing grace to all whose lives my life might touch.

God's mulligan moments for us – and through us- to all God's people. Amen.

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