

As I was watching the British Open this past week they mention that golf would be back into the Olympics in 2016. And I started thinking, that in just over a year from this coming week, the Summer Olympics will be starting. And yes golf will return to the Olympics for the first time since 1904. But as we sit here today, young men and women, and yes, some older men and women, are already training for the Olympics. And these incredible athletes, these men and woman, whose lives have been focused on just one thing – that one thing that every person who has ever dreamed of being in the Olympics – they are focuses first on making the team and represent their Country and then, that one thing that everyone dreams of – they dream about taking home the gold medal.

These men and women have probably been focused on this one thing for many years. They have focused their life on this one dream. A dream that you don't just stumble on, but one you first dream about and then one you have to train and train and train. You focus your whole life on this one thing. They have a single purpose of mind and in many cases it shapes their identity and who they are in life. What their inner being is all about.

And one thing that I always find interesting, is the parents of these young and not so young athletes. Every hope and every ounce of anxiety and expectation can be seen in their face and their body language. Sometimes to the point of being over the top, yet they are there, supporting their children or spouse, with every emotion of love, hoping that those they have raised, or live with, will do their very best and with great hope and love and high expectations – they hope and dream that they will bring home the gold medal! They cheer for their loved ones with every ounce of their being. Can you imagine having someone who would cheer for you like that? Can you imagine being cheered for from the stands? Any of us who have ever played sports may know the feeling.

But, can you imagine that God, our creator, is watching your life as an expectant, a hopeful, an anxious parent? Can you imagine God sitting in the stands, with thousands of people, cheer you on? Now if we can imagine this, we have to imagine, as well, that it

matters to God how we do. Not whether we win or lose, but God cheers for us, because it matters to God who we are and what we do. Both on the sports field as well as in life.

And so we have to ask, what is it that God is looking for? What is it that God hopes to see? Does he care if we win the race, does he care if we finish the race, and does he care if we win the gold? Is it landing on top, crushing our opponent? Why is it that God is in the stands? What is it that God wants to cheer us on for? And here is the interesting part of life: In this life event, the life we live, God is observing us and he is truly interested in us, and here is the interesting part – God knows that **we have already gotten the Gold!** Yes, we have already won the race. Yes, God knows that we are the champions. We have been given grace long before we ever ran the race. That grace that God has given us is the real gold medal.

And the reason we always get the gold medal is that it has been given to us from the very beginning. Paul tells us in our New Testament lesson: “ There is one body, and one Spirit – just as you were called - one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all. But to each one of us, grace has been given as Christ apportioned it.” We have been given the gold medal, the grace from the very beginning! We began the race with the gold medal already around our necks. In our birth and baptism, we were given the gold. In our reaffirmation, God has placed the gold medal around our necks. God says you are my creation, my child. You are my precious jewel. You are the champion. You don’t have to earn what I have already given you! It comes by grace! And all God asks is that we live our lives with this in mind.

Over the past few weeks we have been looking at Paul’s letter to the Ephesians. And one of the key thoughts of the Letter to the Ephesians, is that all things are gathered together in Christ. But with this, it carries with it a clear moral demand. Paul sets these out in the final chapters of this letter. But hear today we read about Paul’s call for unity in the church and for the maturing of each one of us in Christ. That it is by grace that has been given to each one of us, that we are able to grow in faith and that we are united as one in Christ. Paul tells them, and us, that they, and we must live a life of humility, meekness, suffering and love. And all of these lead to a peace and a unity, or the right

relationship with one another. He goes on to tell them that they are called into one with the Father. And that each one of us has grace that has been apportioned by Christ. We have won the race, we are wearing the gold medal and all we need to do is live our life as God has called us to do. And then he tells them that each has been given a gift: to be an apostle, or a prophet, an evangelist or pastor or teacher. Each one of them, and us, have been given a gift to go along with the gold medal, that grace that Christ has promised each of us from birth.

In our Old Testament story, David believed he was living the life that God had called him to live. But it took Nathan to tell David, that he was falling from God's grace by his actions. It sounds like so many of us, we fail to see that the way we are living is not how God wants us to run the race. A common problem throughout life and literature. Great literature and mythology tell the stories of great hero's that carry this tragic flaw and they seem so unaware. Achilles was invincible, except for the vulnerability of his heel and he receives the poison arrow from Paris, which falls the great warrior. Oedipus the king, who knows all, except the one thing he wants to know most of all: the identity of his mother. King Lear who has the world held in the palm of his hand, but does not know, who in his family he can trust. And he trusts the wrong one! Macbeth rises quickly to the throne, but is never able to rid himself of his fear and paranoia. All these stories point to the fundamental truth of our existence, both yours and mine. We all have our blind spots and fail to see the grace that God has given us since birth. The gifts we all have. We fail to run the race that God has put us here to run, we fail to understand that God is watching us from the stands and he has a plan for us, if only we didn't have these blind spots.

But like David and the people of the churches in and around Ephesus, we are all graced by God. Our very being, who we are, is how we lead our lives via the Holy Spirit. It is the means by which we grace the world, or in some cases condemn the world. Our being is the means by which peoples medals shine or tarnish themselves. We can live our lives like the champion that God made us to be, by the grace God has given us or we can lead our lives saddles with the blind spots that we also have. The question becomes, are

we going to leading the life of a champion or not? Are we going to use the gifts that God has given us or not?

Bubba Smith, the late great NFL defensive end, who played for the Baltimore Colts and was an All American in college and All Pro in the NFL. After his retirement he became famous to a new generation of people, when he starred in the Miller Lite commercials, that popularized the phrase, “Taste Great, Less Filling”. Bubba Smith loved do those commercials alongside other ex-NFL stars. During this period Bubba was invited back to his Alma Marta, Michigan State, to be the grand marshal of the homecoming parade. As an all American at Michigan State, this was to be a great honor. But Bubba Smith was in for a greater shock. Instead of being greeted with warm and welcoming applause, what he heard instead, was this: “Taste Great, Less Filling”. He heard this the entire length of the parade.

Bubba Smith realized that his being had more to do with beer than about being a person. He said later: “He didn’t like the effect he was having on a lot of young people. You need to stop compromising your principles”. When Bubba got home he contacted the Miller Brewing Company and told them that he was through – no more commercials.” Bubba Smith’s being became more important than a commercial and the fame it brought. The way he was leading his life, his being, was being challenged.

The Apostle Paul said: “Lead a life worthy of your calling to which you have been called.” And where do we lead our lives? We lead it out there, in the community we live in, in the world we live in! As important as this place of worship is, as important as this table is, from which we will receive the gifts of God today, the grace of God as we share in the bread and the juice, as important as it is for us to gather on Sunday mornings, to worship and share in fellowship and to share that medal that God has given us, the crucial step is still in front of us. It’s important that we worship together. But what matters most is what happens after worship, after we leave this place. What we do out in the world. We can’t just take our medal, that grace that God has given us, and head home as though we have lived the life that God has called us to live. No, we need to go out into the world and

lead the life that God has called us into. To lead the life worthy of our calling. As Paul said: “I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.”

I’m sure Paul would urge you and me to lead a life, mindful of what we are, what we say, of what we do, of how we live our lives and how that is viewed by others, how it influences others. Life is what you live it, what you lead it with, and what you do with it. Or we can lead it by the virtue of who we think we are. If we think we earned our value, we will live life trying to earn that value. If we think life is about survival of the fittest, then we will live our lives trying to be better than anyone else. If we think life is all about having the right answers. Then we will live life trying to be right.

“Lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called.” The biggest difference you or I are going to make, is not in here, but out there, out in the world. And the difference you make, **is in the being you are**. The instrument of grace you allow yourself to be. The medal with which you have been equipped with. Knowing you are graced by God. Knowing how and why you are graced. And channeling that grace through who you are and how you live your life. Lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called. This is the mission of our lives. This is the medal we have already been given. All we need to do know, is to live the life worthy of our calling.

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.