

## GAME OVER

Years ago, as Barbara and I were preparing to go to China to get Rachel and Laura, we happened to be in Mobile on a Saturday. If you have been in Mobile, you know that right where Airport Boulevard meets the interstate, there are a series of malls at that exit. We happened to be at one of those malls, and Barbara spotted a luggage and travel store. She said let's go in and look for some luggage for our trip to China.

So, we did. We went in and looked around. It was kind of a unique shop. They had luggage, but they also had some other kinds of things there. One of the things that I spotted was a Titanic board game. Now, I happen to like board games and this particular game only cost ten bucks. So, I said, "What the heck?" and I pulled out my wallet and bought the board game.

When I mentioned it to Barbara, she made the observation that I had a Titanic obsession. I don't know if that's true anymore, but at the time it probably was accurate. I had the Titanic movie on video, I had a computer game on the Titanic, I had several books on the Titanic that I had read, and now I had a Titanic Board game. Why is it that I had this obsession with the Titanic? Perhaps there are several reasons for it. I happen to be a person that loves history, I love to read history, I love to learn about it. The desire to know about past events is thoroughly ingrained in me. Secondly, I think there's a part of me that's interested in the reactions of people under pressure.

I think the biggest reason is that from my vantage point I can experience extreme danger vicariously from a point of safety. If I read a book on the subject, and I have finished the last page, I close the book, and I am back in my safe world. I am back in reality. If I'm watching a movie, I can rewind the DVD, and I return to reality. If I'm playing the game, the computer will simply tell me, "Game Over," if I don't make it to the lifeboat. Game over. That's a callous way to talk about the most tragic event in maritime history.

Yet, what's so compelling about this scenario is that, within it, death is not permanent. You can always play again. The reality, as all of us know, is quite different. Every one of us dies. The one barrier that none of us can get beyond is death.

While we were living in Jackson, I served on the volunteer fire department. I went out on- I don't know how many- fire calls. One particular incident came back to me as I was thinking about this sermon. We got a call to go to a landfill just outside of Jackson. It was on the other side of the river in Washington County. Turned out that a woman had been working at the landfill. It was a landfill for potash from an industrial site. She backed her dump truck up to the landfill and the side of the cliff collapsed. She wound up trying to jump from the truck and was buried alive in the process. Every rescue service in two counties was called there. We searched for hours before we finally found her remains. With all of our equipment, all of our training. There was absolutely nothing we could do. The one barrier that none of us can get beyond is death.

This last week put in mind of a time that we were in Jackson when we were doing the Disciple Bible study. I think I was thinking about it because I attended a funeral this week for a man who died too young. He died at forty- four years. Chase Epps, the Executive Director of Camp Maranatha. He died from Coronavirus, and he was only forty-four years old. It reminded me of the Disciple bible study. Disciple is put out by the United Methodist Church. One of the participants made the comment that Christianity is a way to beat death. It's a way of forestalling the ultimate ending. The hope that we cling to is that in Jesus Christ death will not be permanent. I thought of that as I sat at that funeral this last week.

Our passage today, finds Paul on his second missionary journey. On his previous journey, Paul had established a church in Corinth. The church in Corinth had a difficult time. Corinth was a very cosmopolitan city. It was a busy seaport with all of the sinful entertainments that implies. Numerous gods were worshipped there. There were major philosophers that had schools there. There were many distractions there for members of that Christian church. It's little wonder that the church began to see some dissension over the question, "What constitutes proper Christian doctrine?"

Apparently, one of the problems that they encountered was that some were preaching that there was no resurrection from the dead. Paul records that in his letter. Paul writes in that letter, "If Christ is preached, that he is raised from the dead, how do some among you preach that there is no resurrection from the dead? But if there's no resurrection from the dead, even Christ has not been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is empty. It's in vain." In other words, Paul is saying, "If you don't believe at least this much, what are you doing here? What are you doing here if you don't believe at least this much? Everything we've done is for naught if you don't believe at least this much.

Now, some of you may be thinking this is obvious. Tom is literally preaching to the choir. Well, maybe. But you would be surprised.

One day when I was in seminary I was asked to preach at a little church in South Carolina. One of the elders of that church, I was told, didn't believe in God. That surprised me. I asked, "If this man, who is an elder in the Presbyterian Church, doesn't believe in God why does he attend church? Why does he come to church if he doesn't believe in God? The answer I got left me scratching my head. The answer that got was that he comes because he believes that the church is a noble institution. Okay. No doubt some of you find it disturbing as I did that an elder in the church believes that it's only a noble institution. What disturbs me even more is that all of us, including me sometimes, treat the church as if it's just a noble institution.

Think not so much about the church and the building itself, but ask yourself how many of us really take the time to pray? If we do, do we really believe that our prayers are answered? How many of us read the scripture even once per week outside the church, that is? How many of us involve ourselves in the mission of the church? How many of us witness our faith to others in the course of the week? Maybe you do, I don't know. I know I, all too often, don't do these things. We say we believe, but do we really?

You know, in English the word “faith” is a noun. It’s something that we have or don’t have. We have a couple of other forms of that word. We have an adjective form. We say that someone is faithful. We talk about someone doing something faithfully. However, the Bible wasn’t written in English; it was written in Greek. In Greek they have a form that we don’t have. It’s a verb form. In the Greek Bible faith is a verb. It’s something we do. It’s not something we have, it’s something we do. Now, they have the other forms too, but far and away the most common form is that verb form. It’s something we do or something we don’t do.

If Jesus hasn’t been raised from the dead, then we haven’t beaten death at all. If we don’t believe, then our faith is empty. I have but one life to live. So do you, and when we reach game over, it’s over- if Christ hasn’t been raised from the dead. I’m here to declare to you that Christ *has* been raised from the dead. Because he’s been raised from the dead, we will be also. The church is more than just a noble institution. It’s a movement. It’s a movement that testifies to Christ’s life and death and resurrection- to his saving grace, which allows us to beat death.

I’m asking you to believe. I’m not asking you to *have* faith, I’m asking you to *do* faith. Go out and do faith! Make faith a verb! Because if we get to game over, there might not be a second chance, and death will have beaten us.