

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church  
Quincy, IL  
Seminarian Brandon Metcalf

Pentecost 10  
Saturday, July 31, 2021 at 5:00 p.m.  
Sunday, August 1, 2021 at 9:00 a.m.

# “The Big Leagues”

Text: Ephesians 4:1-16

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Have you ever had something that you really liked, but just weren't good at? For me, it was baseball. I grew up in St. Louis- the home of Cardinals' baseball. I learned to love baseball when I was growing up, but that never really translated to my playing ability. Let me share my baseball career- I retired from playing baseball in second grade. I played right field in little league, which is where they put all the best players. And then retired at the top of my game. I had led my team in hits....hits by pitches. Second grade little league was the first year that we had the players pitch rather than the coaches, and I stood in that batter's box, unafraid to take a 20 mile an hour fastball right to the body, for the team. True story, I only had two actual hits in my final season in baseball before riding off into the sunset of retirement. Two hits, and they came in the same game. I had a single early on in the game, and then I came up to the plate in the last inning, with the game tied, and the winning run on base. By a miracle of God, I smoke the next pitch and it goes over the center fielder's head for a walk-off double and we win the game. For the next two weeks at school, I got to be the guy who won the baseball game! That's why I retired on the top of my game- because half of my hits won

games. I'm still waiting for a call from the Hall of Fame! The reality is that while I had accomplished a little bit in my baseball career, I retired because I knew I wasn't ready for the next level. Little League was enough, I didn't need to go any further in my career as a player. I'm fine sitting on the sidelines or watching the game from home.

I think we have a tendency to do that same thing when it comes to our faith. We're content being passive recipients in the church rather than active participants. We can recite the Lord's Prayer, without even thinking about the words. Or go through confirmation and consider that a graduation from studying the Bible, or even from church itself. We oftentimes want to be entertained rather than challenged. But this doesn't just impact our own worship experience, but also our witness and outreach. We're content to cheer for missionaries that are serving overseas, but fail to realize the mission opportunities that are right around us each and every day. We don't think we know enough, don't think we'll say the right things, or wonder if it's even our responsibility to share our faith, so we stay silent. And in the process, the mission suffers because it's easy for us to be on the sidelines rather than in the game. It's like we're telling God, "I'm not ready for the Big Leagues." But you can't always control when the call comes.

I received a call a few years back, from a St. Louis area code number- 314. I didn't recognize the number and was busy at the time, but I listened to the voicemail afterwards and here's what it said: "Hi Brandon. This is Alex, from the St. Louis Cardinals front office. We'd like you to give us a call back today when you get the chance." The front office! Those are the guys who make the decisions about the payroll and who's on the roster! At the time, the Cardinals were in the middle of a playoff race, and they

must've heard about my little league career- and how half of my hits won games. This is it- I'm being called up to the Big Leagues!

It turns out they were just trying to sell me some end of the season ticket package. But even if it had been about calling me up to the Big Leagues, I would've said no. Because I'm not equipped for little league, much less the major leagues. I want my team to win! And I know if I'm out there, that would dramatically decrease their chances of winning. Don't call me up- leave it to the professionals!

Here's the thing about the Church- there are no professional Christians. There are people who are paid to oversee church ministry and to publicly proclaim the promises of God that we are all meant to share individually in our relationships. But there are no professional Christians. That'd be like saying, "I'm a professional brother." You're what? "Yeah, I get paid to be a part of this family." Now, this probably happens in a few really rich families- but it's certainly not normally the case. There aren't professional brothers, you're just a part of the family. It's who you are. Sure, you can always get better at communication skills, at learning how to actually vacuum correctly, or at any of the other ways that you live, and serve, and contribute within the family. But none of those things make you a more qualified family member. In the same way, there are no professional Christians- you're a part of the family. It's who you are.

When it comes to the mission of the church, the mission is not carried out by a select few professionals that the rest of us just cheer on. Verse 11-12 of our text from Ephesians 4: "And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ." Notice that while Paul lists out some specific jobs- missionaries, pastors, teachers...what we would consider the "professionals", what are they called to do? To

equip the saints for the work of ministry. To equip, not to do all of the work of the ministry. What Paul is saying here is that **all** of us are called up to the Big Leagues- to be a part of God's mission in this world. And you can't always control when the call comes. You're called up, whenever you go to work and interact with that coworker that is need of hope. Parents, from the moment you become a parent, whether you like it or not, you're being called up- to raise that child in the faith, whether you feel qualified or not. Youth, when you're deciding whether or not to give into peer pressure, you're being called up to the Big Leagues- to be a witness of Christ. You can't always control when the call comes. And you can't just wait for the professionals to take care of it, because God has uniquely equipped and positioned you in your relationships to be able to be His witness in that moment.

It's easy to think, "I don't know enough", "I'm not equipped", "I can't do this" when it comes to the mission of God. Lord, why would you call me up to the Big Leagues? Why would you use me? There's a lot better choices out there. Surely, you can't be serious. God's response: "Yes, I am serious and don't call me Shirley." Just look at who God chose throughout Scripture, who He called up to the Big Leagues to carry out His mission. Moses had issues speaking, and he was fugitive because he was wanted for murder. Not the best resume. Peter gets in trouble for constantly saying the wrong things and Paul was an enemy of the church. He picks tax collectors, and fishermen, and seemingly all the wrong people. That's who God chooses- it doesn't make sense. It's like He picks a team of little league right fielders. But God knows what He's doing. In verse 15, Paul talks about the church as a body, with Christ as the head. That's why we're qualified on the team- because we are a part of a body, and Christ is the head. God's doesn't respond to our objections, to our desire to sit on the sidelines, to not live

mission-centered lives by simply being more selective in who He calls. He doesn't invite a select few onto His mission. Because being on God's team isn't about your qualifications! It's not about your wisdom, your eloquence, your track record, or anything like that. That's not why God calls you! In fact, despite all of that- despite your sin, despite your desire to sit on the sidelines, God calls you.

God gets us involved in the mission of the church by first making us the mission of the church. This is what He does on the cross. God sends His Son and instead of wiping out rebellious humanity- He dies for us. He demonstrates His power through death and weakness. Instead of asking us to do some of the work, He does all of it. It's foolish, it's a stumbling block, and yet it is how we are saved. And then perhaps even more foolishly, after Jesus is raised from the dead, He ascends into heaven and leaves His ministry to His disciples. He calls them up to the Big Leagues, these uneducated, broken sinners. And they do it! Because they are empowered by His Spirit to share the message of this beautiful Gospel. That's all they have, and yet it's enough.

You have the same calling- you too have been called up to the Big Leagues. Well, really there's only one league in the church. There's not two separate leagues- the Big Leagues for church workers and missionaries and the Little Leagues for everyone else. No we're called by One Lord, in One faith, in One baptism, into One league: the missionary league, to borrow the LWML's language. We are all missionaries, we are all on the mission field. And we are all equipped to do exactly what God has called us to do. Because just like the disciples, you are empowered by His Spirit, equipped to do the work of the ministry, and you are a part of Christ's body, so you have everything that you need.

Evangelism, sharing your faith, being called up to the missionary league seems like such a daunting task from our perspective. But it's not about us- it's about Him. Being a part of the missionary league starts with knowing that you are the recipient of the Mission. Yes, you are called to the Mission, but always remember that you are the Mission- God is still at work on you. He is still forgiving you for the times that you stay on the sidelines instead of serving your neighbor in Jesus' name. He still calls you to extend the love and forgiveness that He is giving you to those around you. After He works the mission in your heart and your life, as you again and again are a recipient of God's work in this world, He then sends you back out in the Missionary League.

When you know that you are always a recipient of the mission that you're called to, being in the Big Leagues- being called into God's mission becomes a lot easier. Because it's not about convincing others about something that you've never experienced. It's simply about sharing how you've been impacted by the mission. Simply put, you are equipped for mission by being a recipient of the mission. It's about sharing what God has done for you, using whatever gifts that He has given you.

So welcome to the Big Leagues! You've been called up in the waters of baptism- where you were brought into His family, into His body. And you're equipped with everything that you need- to be pastors, teachers, missionaries, parents, children, students, neighbors, witnesses- different roles, but united in purpose- we're on the same team. Different roles but united in value- we're valuable in Christ regardless of our role on the team. Different roles, but united in love- the love that God has shown to us in His Son- the love that we are sent- that we are all sent to share with the world. In the name of Jesus, Amen.