

GO WITH THE TEAM YOU HAVE!
EPHESIANS 5:15-20
NOVEMBER 24, 1985 THANKSGIVING SUNDAY

"Through many dangers, toils and snares, I have already come. 'Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home." Grace is the boundless, heightless, depthless, limitless love of God. Grace---amazing grace--- sustains you, encourages you, forgives you (gives you second chances), and empowers you to live the life God has given you. Are you thankful for God's grace? Have you experienced God's grace leading you through dangers, toils and snares? Are you thankful for the life God has given you or do you complain, feel sorry for yourself, sulk and pout? Do you feel like quitting? Do you fantasize about the life others lead and wish that you were they?

Ken Callahan, a popular church consultant who led a seminar I recently attended, likes to tell about his experiences as a coach. His team was playing the championship game in the city-wide youth softball league. It was the last of the ninth inning. His team had two outs and was three runs behind. The bench was deathly quiet. There was rustling in the stands as people began packing up their belongings to leave. But, the next batter got a hit, the next walked, and the third got a hit to load the bases.

The people in the stands ceased their preparations for going home and began cheering loudly. The bench exploded with noise and enthusiasm. It was the last of the ninth with two out, three runs behind, the bases loaded, and Bobby walked to the plate.

You need a little background on Bobby. Bobby's parents were in their forties when he was born. Earlier in the season, Bobby's father approached the coach and asked if Bobby could practice with the team. "I don't expect him to play," said the father. "But, I would like him to practice with the team. You see, he has never swung a bat or worn a glove, but we feel it would be good for his development if he learned to play softball." The coach explained that he had a policy: any boy who practiced got to play. So Bobby had played throughout the season, a few innings a game. He had yet to get a hit. His batting record so far was all strike-outs. And now Bobby walked to the plate in the championship game, with two out, last of the ninth, bases loaded and three runs behind.

The players on the bench moaned and groaned, "Oh, no, not Bobby!" The shyest and quietest player on the team slapped the coach on the back and shouted, "Coach, get him out of there!" The coach then proceeded to talk to the boys about team loyalty, team spirit, and cooperation; but the words with which his lecture was greeted cannot be used in church!

Bobby stood at the plate and waited for the pitch. All the pitchers in the league knew that Bobby was a sucker for a high outside pitch so, sure enough, the ball came to the plate high and outside. Bobby swung. "Strike one!" The second pitch was high and outside. Bobby swung. "Strike two!" The stands went crazy. The bench prepared for mutiny. On the third pitch,

evidently Bobby was tired from the first two swings, for he let the ball go by. "Ball one." On the next pitch, the best way to describe what happened is that the ball hit the bat; not that the bat hit the ball, but that the ball hit the bat.

The ball looped over the first baseman's head, landed fair and then bounced foul. The first baseman misjudged the ball and ran out into the field rather than into the sidelines where the ball had landed. Because there were two out, the hit-and-run was on, so all the baserunners ran. Everyone ran except Bobby who had never hit a ball before and was dumfounded! Finally he realized he needed to run and he started towards first, going faster and faster. The pitcher, confident that Bobby would strike out, could not believe that the ball had actually been hit, so he stood on the mound and failed to cover first. The first baseman ran to first, but Bobby beat him and was safe!

By this time a runner had scored and the other runners were advancing rapidly. The first baseman threw the ball to third to catch the runner coming from second, but he overthrew and the ball went wild. All they needed was one out so the fielder threw to second to catch Bobby who by this time was flying, but the ball went through the second baseman's legs back to the first baseman who had started the fiasco. By this time Bobby was rounding third headed for home like a wild man. Remembering his previous mistake, and remembering that indeed haste makes waste, the first baseman carefully and cautiously threw to home but his throw was too short. As the ball bounced to the catcher, Bobby lunged--literally lunged--for home plate and was safe at home to score the winning run.

The team, delirious by this time, picked up Bobby, carried him around the field and gave him the credit for the team's victory. The coach glanced up in the stands to see two middle-aged parents with tears streaming down their faces. Bobby was never the same. He was a changed boy. After that game, he walked with his head erect, his shoulders straight, with self-confidence and assurance.

The coach--Ken Callahan--said that Bobby taught him three things:

- 1) Go with the team you have.
- 2) Count on good surprises.
- 3) We are the Easter people! Decisive events change our lives and shape our destiny. We are the people of Easter, the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the most decisive event in the future of the planet. We live in the confidence that God makes all things new. We live by God's amazing grace.

O give thanks to the Lord, for God is good! Paul wrote to the Ephesians and it was read as our lesson today, 15:20, "Always and for everything give thanks in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father." Express thanksgiving to God by worshipping God with your singing, praying and the offering of your life. Express thanksgiving to God by sharing the abundance of your pantry with the hungry. Express thanksgiving to God by living the life God gave you. Take your life, accept your life as it is. Go with the team you have!

Some complain about their lives. They sit on the bench and complain when Bobby comes up to bat. They sit in the stands and complain about the decisions the coach makes. Especially in the church, we find folks who like to complain! They complain about the ministers. They complain that the

church is too involved in politics. Others complain that the church isn't involved enough with politics. Some folks complain about the music. Some people will complain at the second coming. "Oh, he came too late." Or, "He came too soon." Or, "The trumpet was too loud. Gabriel played the trumpet too loudly!" O, you who complain, give thanks to the Lord, for God is good. Thanksgiving means to accept your life as it is given. Take it, live it, go with the team you have!

Some people look at their lives and feel sorry for themselves. They sit on the end of the bench, watch Bobby go up to the plate, and feel sorry for themselves. "Oh, why does this always have to happen to me!" Some folks like to pout. They sulk in the corner. They won't come out and play. Other people encourage them, "Come on, you'll have fun." "Come on, try it." "Come on, believe in God, trust in Christ, join the church, serve God, get in the swing and do something productive and helpful. Work for world peace. Get signatures to end the nuclear arms race." But, they sulk in the corner. They feel sorry for themselves. They think they've been mistreated, misjudged, passed over, left behind. They feel that other people got the breaks. They feel no one loves them or wants them. They feel lonely. O, you who feel sorry for yourself, give thanks to the Lord, for God is good. God's creation is good. God made you, and God doesn't make junk. Thanksgiving means to accept your life as it is given. You are as good as anyone else. Take your life, accept it, live it. Go with the team you have! Expect good surprises by God's amazing grace. What an adventure is waiting for you! We are Easter people, people of the resurrection!

Some people quit. They are the folks who leave the game when there are two out and three runs behind. They quit. They become disillusioned and discouraged. Later when they hear what an exciting game they missed and that Bobby, of all people, won the game, they feel even more discouraged, for once again life passed them by. They missed the action. They missed the adventure. The quitters are the folks who drop the class when it gets difficult; they want school to be easy. They are the folks who quit their jobs because they just haven't found themselves. They are the folks who walk out of their marriages and families. They are the folks who drop their church membership or become inactive when the church hits a dry spell.

Every life has dry spells. Everyone walks through a desert sometime in his/her life, looking for something more exciting than sand, dying for a drink of cold water. Those who keep plodding along make it. The quitters die in the sun. O, you who want to quit, give thanks to the Lord, for God is good. We have hope for eventual victory. Thanksgiving means to accept your life as it is given. Take your life, accept it, live it. Go with the team you have! Expect good surprises by God's amazing grace. Don't give up! We are Easter people. We are the people of the resurrection and the eventual triumph of God.

Some folks fantasize about a better life. They fantasize about being on a better team. They sit on the bench, watch Bobby go up to bat with the bases loaded, three runs behind, two out, and fantasize, "I wish I had joined the other team. I wish I was on a team with better players." "I wish I belonged to a better church!" Some guys fantasize what it would be like to be married to the other fellow's wife. Some women fantasize about being married to someone else. Some kids fantasize about having different parents. "Wouldn't my life be grand if I were just someone else." O, you who fantasize, give

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DOUGLAS NORRIS
FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
PALO ALTO, CALIFORNIA

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thanks to the Lord for God is good. God's gifts are good, including the gift of your life. You only live this life once. You can't go back and do it over. But, God's grace is amazing. You can start today to live a new life. By the grace of God, you can have a second, third, fourth chance to live the life you've been given, not one you fantasize about.

Go with the team you have! Expect good surprises! We are Easter people!