

Acts 1: 6-11 / Colossians 3: 1-4

“Protecting the Family”

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Last Sunday was the penultimate grid-iron match between The New England Patriots and The L.A. Rams – and it was filled with intense moments – would the Patriots get their sixth ring – would the Rams make good on the gift some thought they received to be in the super bowl – and most important of all would the commercials be any good?

I had a favorite – as did many other viewers – the NFL 100 commercial to celebrate next year being the 100th season of the National Football League.

It featured a room full of football legends – retired and active players – along with others who are in some way part of football’s sport.

They are gathered in a room akin to a wedding reception and the football centerpiece gets knocked off the center cake and the room’s attention is averted to the loose football then former Chicago Bear Mike Singletary yells, “fumble” and the room erupts in a football melee.

If you haven’t seen it google nfl 100 and it should come up.

If your sitting in contemporary worship, let’s watch it...[**show video clip**]

The commercial tribute featured more than 40 current and former NFL players including 19 Hall of Famers.

So, in the spirit of NFL 100, see if you recognize the following names and how they converge within the realm of National Football League players.

“Lawrence Taylor” “Joe Theisman” “Michael Oher”

Who knows them?

Who know how their football stories fit together?

The first two, for those who don’t know, were involved in a National Football League highlight film that neither wanted to be in – especially Joe Theisman.

Theisman was quarterback for the Washington Redskins and Taylor was playing linebacker (I believe) for the New York Giants.

The play was designed to be one of trickery, whereby Theisman handed the ball off to his running back, who when reaching the line of scrimmage stopped, turned and tossed the ball back to Theisman who was going to throw it downfield for a completion to one of his receivers.

It was a razzle-dazzle type play.

Theisman stood in the pocket, looking downfield for an open receiver, Taylor came rushing in from his left side – the side opposite most quarterbacks throwing arm – as a result Theisman did not notice Taylor barreling down on him from the left side – or what has come to be known as “The Blind Side” for the majority of football quarterbacks.

Taylor hit Theisman cleanly, the way Theisman went down though caused so severe a break of his lower leg that it has come to be known as “The Break” among sportscasters and other sports aficionados.

If you've seen the video of this hit – you will never forget it – as Theisman's foot can be seen “flopping” around seemingly held onto his body by merely the sock covering his foot.
To my knowledge, this was Theisman's career ending injury as he never took another snap in the NFL.

As a result of this play, the left tackle has come to be the second highest paid position in the NFL behind that of only the quarterback on a professional football team.

The reason being, this is the position responsible for protecting and securing piece of mind for the quarterback to be fully present in the game, focusing on the field ahead, knowing/trusting/secure in the fact that the left tackle will make sure no one will enter this blind side unblocked.

The left tackle's job is to make sure the quarterback has time to throw the ball.

The left tackle will even commit a penalty of holding a rushing defender to ensure his quarterback is protected.

Left tackle is the position played by Michael Oher who was a first round draft pick by the Baltimore Ravens in the 2009 NFL draft.

It is Michael Oher's story upon which the movie *The Blind Side* is based on.

If you've not seen the movie, you will want to put it on your list as movies to see.

Disclaimer note: There are some scenes you may not want your children to view so parents watch it first – though overall I highly recommend it.

There is a great scene in the movie *The Blind Side* when LeeAnne Tuohy – Michael's “adoptive” mom – explains to him how important this position is and how Michael should play the position...

She pulls the quarterback over and says, “Remember when you took me to your neighborhood and you told me to stay behind you and that you wouldn't let anything bad happen to me – you'd protect me – you had my back – this quarterback is me – don't let anything happen to him.”

Pulling the running back over, she said, “This is S.J. (Sean Tuohy, Jr. - their son). Remember when the air bag deployed in the car? What did you do? ... You stopped it. Right, you protected him.”

“These two are in the backfield. They are your family. You protect them like you protect us. Don't let anything happen to them. You got their back.”

The left tackle guards the quarterback's “Blind Side.”

The left tackle frees the quarterback to focus attention on the play as it unfolds before him.

A quarterback trusts his left tackle to protect him.

If football were played in ancient times, *the left tackle*, ancient people might say, “would be seated at the left hand of the quarterback” – meaning given the logistics of the football game, and that the quarterback is right handed and cannot see what is coming from his left side – the left tackle is seated at the highest place of honor.

Our Apostles' Creed declares that “[Jesus] ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty.”

Our texts this morning declare to us that

- “After Jesus declared [the disciples] will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon [them]; and they will be Christ's witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth. [Then,] Jesus was lifted up [ascended], and a cloud took him out of their sight.” (Acts 1:8-9)

- “So if you have been raised with Christ (through one’s baptism), seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on the earth...” (Colossians 3:1,2)

Seated at the right hand – isn’t about placement...

Seated at the right hand – is about position!

To sit “at” the right hand of another is to have the place of highest honor.

This goes back to the time when warriors carried a shield in their left hand and an offensive weapon in their right.

This made one particularly vulnerable to attack from the right, and therefore every chieftain or king placed his most trusted warrior at his right.

As a result, the custom evolved of having the most honored adviser of a king sit at the right of the throne.

Similar customs continue to this day, when in many cultures it is customary to seat the guest of honor at the right hand of the host or hostess.

To “sit at the right hand” is therefore a sign of great favor – of shared authority.

It isn’t about placement – it’s about position!

These are images of a king reigning in authority and power over his kingdom.

Jesus, who died a criminal’s death, is now raised to the position of victorious king and Lord.

Jesus resurrection, ascension into heaven and his sitting at the right hand of God are all the same triumphal phase of Jesus’ mission as Messiah and Savior.

When we affirm as The Apostles’ Creed declares, that Jesus “is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty,” we’re affirming that he now shares in the Father’s power and authority.

It’s important here to remind ourselves what it means to speak of God as “Almighty”:

Almighty refers to God’s ruling power over all creation.

John Calvin – one of our Presbyterian fathers explains:

“This is as if it were said that Christ was invested with lordship over heaven and earth, and solemnly entered into possession of the government committed to him – and that he not only entered into possession once for all, but continues in it, until he shall come down on Judgment Day.”

In brief, the ascension is about Jesus’ victory.

His victory over sin – his victory over death – his victory over all that would hold us down.

The one who in his resurrection conquered death now sits at the very throne of God.

Not only that...because Jesus is there the evil that once held us captive no longer has the power to do so.

Someone is protecting our blind side!

Some is protecting the family!

If we once might have been inclined to fear not only the powers of evil but also God, because as sinners we could not stand God’s holiness, now we know otherwise, for, as Calvin says,

“Jesus Christ now ‘fills with grace and kindness the throne that for miserable sinners would otherwise have been filled with dread.’”

We don't have to fear life – we can live life.

We don't have to be afraid of making the wrong choice time, after time, after time...

we have One on our side who can breathe new life and inspiration into tired souls!

we have one on our side who can bring resurrection into old, tired, near death experiences!

The great news of resurrection and ascension is that this new life can begin today when we simply say “yes” to God who has already said “yes” to us.

In Jesus' life, in Jesus' death, in Jesus' resurrection, God has proclaimed to the world how important we are to God.

In Jesus' ...

– the one who in the words of the author of the New Testament book Hebrews, “has been tempted in every way as we are yet is without sin”

– the one who has been called, “the pioneer and perfecter of our faith”

... in Jesus' ascension and in Jesus' taking a seat at the right hand of God, God has proclaimed to the world that the one who sits there is one who identifies with us because he has walked our walk, talked our talk and overcome the human predicament of sin.

The ascension provides a direct link into the unique power of the gospel –

- ***the Good News of Christ's grace as revealed in and through his life, death and resurrection –***
- ***and how that grace can transform our lives into the wonderful creations God knows we can become!***

The two great overarching themes of the ascension, celebrate and define the very core of our faith:

- **Christ is Lord of all!**
- **We are commissioned and called by Christ to live in this world as people who know it!**

Our vitality and mission, our personal discipleship – both of these benefit from our knowledge of Ascension.

- **We are called to be Christ's joy-obsessed witnesses serving and loving with reckless abandon until he comes again in the fullness of time! (*Whenever that might be.*)**

We don't need to worry about what's going to hit us – for Christ is protecting the family!

We don't need to worry about how we'll face tomorrow – because to paraphrase the words of LeeAnne Tuohy, “Christ has our back!”

And that is the relationship that tells us who and whose we are – we are to focus on what that means for our lives – like the 1st Century Disciples...like the Colossian Christians, we are called to live empowered by the knowledge that our life is most fully revealed and found not in this world – rather our life is found in Christ!

When life bears down on us – let us never forget that we have Jesus the Christ – watching out for our blind side – even taking a penalty to protect us – so that we can focus on what is unfolding in front of us – and in the protection of this knowledge we can make the right calls in our lives so that what transpires is a fulfilling life – for us and for those around us!

It's not always going to be easy – and sometimes we might take a hit or two!

Faithful people are only left alone when they are forgotten and we have a Savior who never forgets – who never takes a time-out – who never abandons us – who protects us – in this life and the next!

And that is something we all can work into our game plans.

Let us pray: We trust in your unfailing love, Lord Jesus. We trust in your promise to be with us always, enduring Companion. We rejoice in your salvation, risen Savior. As we patiently await your coming again, help us to act on the love you have shown us and the gift you have promised. For we know that when you ascended, you did not leave us. You promised your Spirit to guide and protect us. In that knowledge, help us to live the lives of faith you call us to. Amen.