

Winning at the game of life: Texas Hold 'Em

Message for Sunday, October 23, 2016
by Bruce Fraser

Scripture: Luke 14:28-33

Children's Message:

Show a blueprint for building a house. Everything is carefully planned. There is a list of the materials needed, along with how much they cost. I also show them a quote from a local contractor for work we did on our basement. It details all the work to be done, along with the cost.

The point: we don't start a big project like that without knowing how much it will cost, and whether we can afford it.

Jesus calls us to commit our life to follow him. It costs a great deal—everything—but it's worth it, because following Jesus is the best way to live.

Message: "Winning at the game of life: Texas Hold 'Em"

In this series of messages, I'm imagining life as a game. I'm using different games and sports as metaphors to draw out important principles about life. Today, I'm looking at poker, in particular Texas Hold 'Em, perhaps the most popular form of poker right now.

In Texas Hold 'Em, every time there is a betting round, you have three moves. You can fold, which means, "I've got garbage cards. I'm going to sit out this hand." You can call, which means you match the bet of the other players. If you have a really good hand, you can raise, which means you match the bet of other players, and then go still higher (although you might just be bluffing, and there are amazing stories of people winning huge amounts of money just by bluffing). Those are the common moves, but there is one other move. It's not often used, because it's very risky. That move is called "all in." That means you take *all* your chips and bet the whole works. If you win, you get a pile of money from all the other players. And if you lose, well, you've lost everything.

Life is like that. There are common things we do regularly. But now and then there comes an

opportunity to go all in. It's risky, but the reward can be great.

1) Jesus calls us to go all in

Jesus talked about risk. In Luke 14, Jesus was calling people to follow him, become his disciples. But he warned them: before you make such a big decision, consider what you are doing. Count the cost of being my disciple.

Luke 14:28-30, 33, New Living Translation:

"But don't begin until you count the cost. For who would begin construction of a building without first getting estimates and then checking to see if there is enough money to pay the bills? Otherwise, you might complete only the foundation before running out of funds. And then how everyone would laugh at you! They would say, 'There's the person who started that building and ran out of money before it was finished!' ...

So no one can become my disciple without giving up everything for me."

Now, obviously here, Jesus is not talking about foolish risks. You don't want to take foolish risks with your money, no get-rich-quick schemes. No foolish risks with your relationships, like listening to or spreading gossip, or sex outside of marriage. You don't want to take foolish risks with your integrity.

The challenge to which Jesus calls us, the risk he puts before us, is to follow him. It's a godly risk, not a foolish risk. Let me give you an example of the difference that knowing Jesus can make in a person's life.

John Stonestreet wrote about an amazing meeting between two enemies.

Between 1986 and 1991, Adriaan Vlok served as South Africa's Minister of Law and Order and also sat on South Africa's State Security Council. This was during the Apartheid era, and as the person in charge of national security, Vlok was behind many of the regime's most repressive and drastic measures: hit squads, bombings, and assassinations of anti-apartheid activists. Then apartheid fell, blacks could vote, and a new government was voted in. Vlok was no longer a person of power.

Fifteen years later, on Aug. 1, 2006, Vlok entered the government building where he used to have his office, and asked to see Frank

Chikane. Chikane, a black person, had been active in the fight against apartheid, and in the new government was now a cabinet minister. Chikane and Vlok had some dealings with each other before that: when Vlok was in power, he had tried to assassinate Chikane by lacing his underwear with paraoxon, a potent insecticide. Chikane survived, but only because he received emergency medical treatment in the United States.

Why did Vlok want to see Chikane that day? To ask forgiveness. Quaking as he stood before the man he tried to kill, he read from something he'd written on the front of his Bible: "I have sinned against the Lord and against you! Will you forgive me?" He then pulled a bowl out of his briefcase and asked if he could wash Chikane's feet.

A startled Chikane said yes. As Vlok proceeded to wash his feet, both men dissolved into tears.

What was behind all this? Vlok had met Jesus, and realized this was what he needed. He surrendered his life to Jesus. He went all in. You see, following Jesus isn't merely a matter of saying, "I believe in you, Jesus." It means obeying Jesus, no matter where that takes you. For Vlok, it meant going to the people he had hurt, and asking forgiveness. (Actually, we should all do this; not just Vlok).

For you, it might mean being part of a ministry helping children who need extra help in school. Some of you might feel called to help with the Syrian refugees when they finally come here to Stirling. There are many opportunities for you to pursue as a follower of Jesus Christ.

2) You can tell your story

There is one area which we can all be part of. You can tell your story of what Jesus means in your life.

Origen is the name of one of the leaders of the church in the 3rd century. When Origen was 17 years old, his father was arrested for being a Christian, and was tortured and killed. This was during the terrible persecutions of Christians by the Roman empire. Origen was aflame with the desire to follow his father and share in glorious martyrdom. His mother pleaded with him not to go, but the headstrong boy did not want to listen to reason. His quick thinking mother did what she

could—she hid his clothes. Though Origen stormed and protested, she wouldn't reveal where they were hidden. He couldn't leave the house, and so he was unable to volunteer for martyrdom.

Isn't it interesting? Origen was brave enough to be martyred, but not brave enough to go outside naked. Stepping outside without clothing would actually have sped up his arrest and imprisonment, but it was a step he was unwilling to take. He was willing to sacrifice his life for Jesus, but he wasn't willing to lose his dignity or his pride.

In a sense, I suspect that talking with a friend about our faith is, for many of us, the equivalent of going outside naked. It makes us uncomfortable. We feel exposed. We declare that we will give our lives for Christ if he should ask it, but to risk a bit of embarrassment for him seems to be beyond our level of discipleship. How sad.

The apostle Paul describes how he felt about sharing his faith.

Ephesians 3:8, New Living Translation:

Just think! Though I did nothing to deserve it, and though I am the least deserving Christian there is, I was chosen for this special joy of telling the Gentiles about the endless treasures available to them in Christ.

Was he reluctant? Embarrassed? Hardly!

Paul was excited about the privilege of telling the story of Jesus. You can put your name in there. You could say, just think, though Bruce did nothing to deserve it, and though Bruce is the least deserving Christian there is, Bruce was chosen for the special joy of telling others about the endless treasures available to them in Christ. You can do the same thing. Same thing for you. Just put your name in that place. God chose you to share your story of faith.

You can tell others about the difference that Jesus makes in your life. You can tell how knowing Jesus gives you hope in times of trouble, how he gives you strength to keep on going through hardship, how he gives you peace when the unexpected messes up your plans.

Today, I want to challenge you to take some risks, to go all in. I don't want you to fold, saying "I'm finished, I quit." Jesus said he came to give us life in all its fullness [John 10:10]. We don't get that by staying in bed.

Let me talk to just some of you for a second before we pray. Some of you are taking a risk in an area that you don't need to take a risk in. That is, you haven't surrendered your life to Jesus Christ. If so, then you're missing out on the best part of life. You're missing out on the peace, the love, the joy, the excitement that comes when Jesus is in your life. And that's just the life here on earth. What comes next is even better, and you risk missing out on that, too. Go all in, and give your life to Jesus.

Next Steps:

- Jesus calls you to follow him, to obey. Will you say "Yes" or "No"? Yes means life, purpose, ambition, making a difference.
- Pray for wisdom and guidance. What in particular will you do for Jesus? How can you serve others?
- Share the good news with _____.
(I initially had "Share the good news with someone," but that's too vague. Write someone's name in there; that makes it concrete.)