

## You're the "Next Man Up"!

A sermon based on Acts 1:15-26

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

This morning, I'm going to go ahead and do something that I don't often do in sermons, and that's apologize. You see, for those who don't already know, I'm a Green Bay Packer fan (I don't apologize for that) but I try not to make too many references to them in my sermons. That's one of my rules. Well, today, I'm going to break that rule, a few times, but don't worry, it's not because of my allegiance to them, but, because, well, you'll see the connections.

Anyway, it was the 2010 NFL season, which from any outsider's perspective, should have been a lost season for the Packers. Too many injuries, too many star players missing a significant amount of time. Their roster was slowly being depleted, and no "star" quality help was on the way.

But it was the first time I had heard it used, the team motto: "Next Man Up." The team expectations weren't lowered. They all knew no one was going to take it easy on them because they were at a seeming disadvantage. They had to make do with what they had. And it was time for the next person on the depth chart to step up and prove himself...and boy, did they. Out of what could have been a disaster of a season rose a determined team who ground it out and ended up on top, with a Super Bowl victory!

Well, fellow stewards, with all this talk about Christian stewardship, it's easy to get caught up in the "money" aspect of it because that seems to be the word that grabs our attention, makes us listen with tentative and sometimes critical ears. But just as important are the time and talents portions, which tend to play off of each other. So, let's focus in on those two parts of stewardship today and discover how you, member of the body of Christ, are part of God's team...part of Light of the World's team...and a spot in the starting lineup has opened up and guess what, you're the "Next Man Up"!

I imagine the disciples were facing a similar situation. They were missing a huge part of the team, Jesus, who had already ascended. You'd think they'd be reeling from that "loss," especially since the day of Pentecost hadn't come yet, and neither had that outpouring of the Holy Spirit, which Jesus promised them. But that hadn't happened yet.

So they were dealing with that. Add to that another key loss with the hard news concerning Judas, who not only betrayed Jesus, but was dead, the victim of suicide. And, finally, factor in their opponents, the Pharisees, the chief priest and teachers of the law, they were gaining strength and courage for the fight against Jesus' followers. If any team had a reason to be down, it was this fledgling group of believers. And yet, from our verses today, we see they didn't just down and sulk and say "oh, woe is me."

No, look at what they did, they had an opening among the Twelve and they looked for someone to fill the ranks. It was time for someone to step up to the plate...the "Next Man Up."

They had two worthy candidates, Joseph Barsabbas and Matthias. Both fit the criteria...someone who had been following Jesus the whole time, since his baptism, and someone who had witnessed the resurrected Lord. And besides that, they were both eager to serve. It was a win-win situation for the

rest of the Apostles. So, they merely prayer for God to reveal the right man for the job, and he did. It was Matthias, and the rest rejoiced as he was added to the “team.”

It’s that easy right? We also have a team here, our church family. We always have a good amount of “roster” spots open for people to get involved in our different ministries here. And I look out here or on our membership list, and I see a bunch of fine candidates who are more than equipped to claim their spot, to find their niche of service here, to help this team succeed. And all you need to do is step up.

It’s that easy, right? A fellow pastor lamented how slow it seemed at his congregation; there wasn’t a lot going on. It wasn’t that there wasn’t ministry that needed to get done; it wasn’t that there weren’t a lot of ministry opportunities out there. Just not a lot of people were stepping up to help out. “I would get it started,” he lamented, “but what happens if I would leave? There would be no preschool, no catechism, no outreach, no elders work being done. The lawn wouldn’t get mowed, communion cups wouldn’t get set up, bulletins would cease.”

Do you understand his point? It’s something I considered when I was deliberating my call a couple of months ago. What would happen to certain ministries (or church work) here if I were to leave?

Ok, understand, this is not pastor standing up like the Pharisee in the temple, drawing God’s attention and everyone else’s to him and what he’s doing, how he’s so indispensable, looking for the biggest pat on the back. And this is not pastor trying to shirk the duties of his call, so he can be doing as little as he possibly can.

The truth is, even though there are things in the church only the pastor can do, ministry does not just depend on him. It doesn’t depend only on the Council. It shouldn’t even just depend on a handful of people. No, this is your church. This is your ministry. This is your team.

So, what keeps you on the sidelines? Is it the thought that this church stuff is Pastor’s deal? I once had someone who thought that, had a problem with something going on at the church, and I tried to talk to her about how she could be the agent of change, and her response was, “Pastor, this is your church, you take care of it.” Is that right? Is that the right mindset? Is that a godly mindset? Or is it more like on the football field, how the quarterback is usually the one who gets the team going, but he can’t do it all himself.

How about this: “No one asks me to help out, otherwise, I would.” Did that work when you were younger? Mom asks you why you didn’t clean your playroom with your sibling, you said, “Cuz no one asked me to,” and she let that excuse slide? Again, this is your family, your team, your church.

Or maybe, you don’t think your worthy. “Being on the Council is a pretty prestigious position. Being a Sunday School teacher is way out of my league. Going out with the outreach team, or doing any amount of outreach, for that matter, you have to be on top of your game with your Bible knowledge...I don’t think I can handle it.”

Or, maybe you’re thinking, “Someone else will do it; it still gets done without me.” I think all of us would have to admit that, at one time or another, we’ve been that person. We’ve been content to just sit back, be apathetic, lukewarm in our Christian stewardship, spiritually lazy with our time and talents rather than stepping up and taking ownership of this, which is one of the incredible blessings and privileges of being a part of God’s family of believers and of this local family of believers.

Shame on me if I've done a poor job of equipping you to serve and providing you with opportunities and encouragement to serve. Shame on you if you are being equipped and encouraged to serve but are still failing to be the "next man up," giving anything less than 100% with your gifts, as God commands when he says, "Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms."

If that's you, join me at the foot of the cross, where, with repentant hearts, we can lay down those failings, our sins of less than perfect Christian stewardship.

And look up, because for your imperfect offerings of time and talents, the perfect sacrifice dies for you. Just take a moment to take that all in. For your sinful failings to be the "next man up" to willingly and eagerly serve God, the one who never failed, never sinned, willingly and eagerly and selflessly gave himself, his life up for you!

And Jesus, our Savior, who lived and died for you,, who has taken away your sins, who beat that cross when he rose from the dead, has now given you a second chance at life, has paved the way for you to be the "next man up" when it comes to using your time and talents.

You don't have to a spiritual superstar to get involved in our ministries here. I'm proof of that! Really, the criteria to be the "next man (or to be more PC, the next person) up" are simple, just like the disciples' were in choosing a replacement apostle. Just three questions: 1) Do you love Jesus? 2) Have you been blessed by God in your life of Christian stewardship with any amount time, talents, treasures? 3) Do you want to follow Jesus' commands?

If you answered "yes" to those three questions (and it should be hard not to!), you're perfect, the person we're looking for...we have a spot for you on this team. And we have opportunities for you to serve. Again, like I said earlier, everything we do here is ministry, and every ministry opportunity has openings!

Now, I could spend the next several minutes listing off the specific ministries (and I'd be more than happy to do that for you if you'd like), but that would rob your New Man of the joy of discovering the best place or places where you can get involved. Rather, I'll do my part for the team and be your cheerleader, your encourager as you find ways you can step up here.

Team members, here's my first piece of encouragement: don't wait for someone else to show up and do the work. There's a reporter for the Packers', Vik Ketchman, who puts together a daily column online where he'll answer people's questions concerning Packers, football, or just life in general. Every time someone gets hurt and people start freaking out and saying we should look for a replacement in free agency, Vik'll say, "Oh, I'll just go out back and shake my wide receiver tree, or my quarterback tree, or my linebacker tree and see what quality player falls out." And, almost always, there're pretty slim pickings.

It's no surprise that we're a fairly small congregation. When a ministry opportunity opens up, when someone who's been extremely active in the congregation leaves (which we had someone like that, who just recently left), the pool of potential replacements or capable servants is not excessively deep. We can't just go out back and shake my zealous, willing servant tree and expect a bushel's worth to fall out.

Friends, don't wait for the next person to come and get involved or make a profound impact here. Make that person you!

Besides filling service roles here, another way you can help is with your prayers. In our first lesson, the apostles prayed that the Holy Spirit would show them who their next "teammate" was. My prayer, when it comes to our ministries here, is either that God sends the right person for that particular service role or that he would move and enable one of you to step up into that role. And it's awesome when God answers those prayers, which let me tell you, he does! Let that be your prayer as well.

And, maybe as a final point, and thankfully, just one last football reference, so many analysts say "football is a young man's game...it's a game of replacement." There comes a time and an age when a football player just cannot physically keep up with the game anymore and has to give way to the younger generation.

The same is true here. We've been blessed with so many members who, for so many years, have faithfully given of their time and talents to support and get involved in the ministries here. Thank you!

Now, you're not off the hook, because a believer's entire life is a life of service. There are still ways for you to be involved. But the real encouragement (and I'd ask for your help in this area) is to those of you who are younger, maybe less experienced. Now is your time. You are the next generation. You've seen your parents, your peers, and their love for their Savior turn into a love of serving him. You are the next generation. Now it's your turn to step up to the plate. You are the "next man up"!

You know, in the typical congregation, Christian stewardship looks like this...about 20% of the people give 80% or who are doing 80% of the work. Friends, let's not be the norm. Let's become the exception. God has blessed you incredibly, far beyond what any of us could hope or imagine. It's time to give back. It's time to get off the bench. It's time to be the next man up! And I assure you, as you do, you might not always get the notice or the appreciation here. In the long run, that doesn't matter. But you have what matters most. Because of what Jesus has done for you, because of your willing response to his loving sacrifice for you with your own life of service, you have God's approval. He gladly says to you, "Well done, good and faithful servant." That's all you need! Amen.