

I wonder, how many of you saw the Super Bowl last Sunday? Did you see the half-time show? Officially, the show was the “Justin Timberlake’s Pepsi Super Bowl 52 Halftime Show.” I heard the show wasn’t very good this year, so I watched it on YouTube during the week. I wasn’t impressed.



But I decided that, if Mark’s gospel were a football game, today’s lesson would be the Super Bowl half-time show. Think about what you know of Super Bowl half-time shows, even if you may never have seen one yourself:

- There’s always a dazzling light show.
- There’s the person who whom we are supposed to pay attention, the star, in sparkling clothes, moving around and getting our attention.
- There often are superstar guests, people past their prime, who put in cameo appearances as a sort of endorsement for the new superstar.
- And there are always out-of-this world sound effects, endorsing and drawing our attention to the one to whom we are to listen.

Make no mistake: Mark MEANT us to hear today’s gospel lesson as half-time, the half-way, between the beginning and end of Jesus’ earthly ministry. In the first place, today’s lesson is literally just past the half-way point in Mark’s 16-chapter narration of Jesus’ life. Then, too, Jesus had just finished a serious “Who do you say that I am” talk with his disciples. Jesus had told them he would die in Jerusalem. Even in today’s lesson, Jesus had told his disciples to not tell anyone what had happened until after he “was risen from the dead.” He had commanded those who would follow him to pick up their cross and follow him.

So this was half-time—not of a game, but of life. Think about what can happen to us at the half-time of our lives. We have a name for that: mid-life crisis. Like Jesus in Mark’s gospel, we are busy DOING in the first half of life. Jesus was teaching in every town and healing everyone in sight. WE go to school, leave home, launch careers, have children (or not), and then wonder: Is THIS all there is in life?

In today’s gospel lesson, this half-time show, Jesus took his three closest followers up the holy hill to show them what life’s all about: an encounter with God. And God told each of them how to spend their lives: “Listen to Jesus,” he said, “follow Jesus.”

Notice that Andrew wasn’t with them, foreshadowing his disappearance from scripture after Jesus’ ascension into heaven. The others, less Judas Iscariot, evangelized their whole world and founded the

Christian Church, but we don't hear about Andrew. Presumably he didn't make the half-time turn from being to doing-with-God's-purpose. So here, just Peter, James, and John accompanied Jesus on this half-time excursion up a mountain to get their AND OUR divine instruction for life: listen to Jesus; follow Jesus.

Why was the great prophet Moses of old on this mountain today with Jesus? If you recall, Moses had climbed a holy hill to talk with God. Then he came down the hill with ten "suggestions" from God for how to live in right-relationship with him and with each other. In other words, Moses brought the Ten Commandments down the hill with him. This covenant between God and humanity was the Law, the Thou Shalts and the Thou Shalt Nots. And now here is Jesus, on another holy hill. Mark was saying that this event marked the time when all of life would be based on the new covenant foretold by Jeremiah:

I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts (God said to Jeremiah)

I will be their God, and they will be my people.

When did THAT happen, if not here at "half-time" in Jesus' ministry?

As for Elijah, the other person on the mountain with Jesus, Elijah was, like Moses, a great prophet, but also a healer, like Jesus. Elijah's return had been foretold as a sign of the coming of the Messiah, God born among us.

So, having both Moses AND Elijah on the holy hill with Jesus, makes this half-time show the "big reveal," showing us Jesus' true and full identity as God's son. Jesus is the one foretold, the one we are to engrave in our hearts, the one to whom we are to listen and heed as we embrace the Kingdom of God that has drawn near.

If Jesus is The One, the invitation to us is also clear: Follow Jesus, come what may. God is calling us to listen to Jesus and Jesus is telling us to follow him.

The alternatives—not accepting the invitation to move forward—are also clear (but disastrous): We can fail to follow Jesus and get stuck in place—even unto death. OR, we can do God's work but be blind and deaf to whose we are, leaving us susceptible—like Peter, James, and John—to becoming so anxious that we substitute our pet project for Jesus' work, which is another kind of stuck in place.

I delight that Church of the Resurrection has learned ITS half-time lesson well and chosen to follow Christ Jesus, trusting where he leads us. There's safety in numbers; let's stay together on this!

Today we will honor Carleigh and Araceli, two Girl Scouts who saw an opportunity to feed their hungry neighbors by starting a community garden. This was not an easy task! Christ Jesus must have

suggested to them what he wanted them to do and they did it. Something told them they should and could do this difficult thing, and they succeeded.

The Boy Scouts of our Troop 2005 quietly helped. They pitched dirt and mulch and weeds. And, in the process they caught the vision, too.

I want you to know, all associated with this project, that the food pantry supported by the garden you created, by the time we move into temporary quarters in November (God willing) will have feed about 8,000 people. And, I am happy to say, there are plans afoot for “pocket gardens” among the landscaping of what will be our new church and food pantry. So, the reality you helped create will live on.

This is but one story of Jesus’ disciples accepting their half-time question, the question that turns out to be pivotal in each of our lives: will we be takers in this life, or givers? Will we take what we can and leave our world as messed up as it was when we entered it, or will we do as the voice from above said and listen to Jesus: Follow him.