

THEME: “The Gamble of Motherhood”

May 8, 2016

Dear Friends in Christ,

Acts 1:15-17, 21-26

I wonder how many risk takers we have in church this morning, how many people that are not afraid to take a gamble or two in life. If that describes you, maybe you can relate to a fellow in France who thought he'd made a real shrewd business deal 49 years ago. He agreed to pay a 90-year-old woman \$500 a month until she died as a way of purchasing her apartment. Apparently this is a common practice in France. The elderly owner enjoys a monthly income from the buyer, but once the owner dies the apartment immediately becomes the buyer's, which could prove to be a real bargain for the buyer – provided – and this is a big provision – provided the owner dies sooner rather than later.

Unfortunately for the buyer in this particular case, the 90-year-old woman simply would not die. In fact, she lived for another 31 years and reached the ripe old age of 121. And since the buyer was locked into this arrangement, he ended up paying more than \$184,000 for an apartment that he never even got to live in because he died before the woman did. That was definitely one gamble that did not pay off!

But that's not unusual, is it? I mean, how many big lottery winners do we have in church today? How many of you have won the Publishers Clearinghouse Sweepstakes winners? I remember many years ago when I was probably a young teenager, I decided to enter the Readers Digest Sweepstakes and I was determined to follow it through to the end. Little did I know all that it would involve and how it would drag on for months and months. But apparently I wasn't the only one gambling at winning something in that sweepstakes because when all was said and done, not only did I not win the grand prize of \$10 million, I didn't even win one of the 50,000 cheap little watches they were supposedly giving away.

So typically, gambles just don't pay off. No one beats the odds forever. And yet that still doesn't deter countless throngs of people in our society today from going to Las Vegas or the gambling boats or the casinos or playing the local gaming machines that have popped up all over town the past couple of years. I love how one man put it. He said, “I went to Las Vegas recently. I lost my car. I lost my watch. I lost my money. Come to think of it, I lost everything except my good luck charm.”

Well, in the light of all I've just said, it might surprise us and even disturb us a bit to see the disciples of Jesus in our text casting lots, which was a form of gambling back then, only they were doing it to determine who would succeed Judas, the one who had betrayed Christ into the hands of

his enemies and then took his own life. This method of choosing a replacement for Judas which would have been somewhat similar to our rolling of the dice may seem like a rather odd way to make such an important decision. And yet it was commonly practiced back in biblical times. And in all fairness to the disciples, our text does tell us that they did pray before casting the lots, asking the Lord to show them through this method which of two men he had chosen to replace Judas. They may have also had in mind this interesting verse from Prov. 16:33 which says: *“The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD.”* So what it all boils down to is that they were not gambling in order to get rich quick. Rather, they were simply gambling on God.

Now you’re probably wondering what all this talk about gambling has to do with Mother’s Day. Well, wouldn’t you agree with me when I say that there is perhaps no greater gamble in life than that which involves bringing a child into this world? Indeed, it’s not easy being a mother in today’s world, is it? And all the moms said, AMEN to that, right?

Perhaps some of you moms here today can relate to the one mother who on her 40th birthday received a very expensive wrinkle-removing cream from her teenage daughter. When she was asked by a friend what her daughter gave her the previous year, she replied without missing a beat, “That’s the year she gave me the wrinkles!”

A fairly recent study revealed some interesting things that reflect how difficult it is being a mother today. It showed to no one’s surprise that most working mothers do not get enough sleep. More than half of these women (54%) get 6 or fewer hours of sleep each night and 16% get 5 or fewer hours each night. These mothers were asked if there was an extra hour in the day, how would they most like to spend it. 44% said they would spend it with their children; 28% said they would use it for personal time; and 15% said they would spend it sleeping.

The gamble of motherhood begins the moment a woman finds out she is pregnant. Not only does her body begin to undergo some pretty remarkable changes, but that’s when the worries of motherhood also begin to set in. Will my child be healthy? Will it be normal? Will it have colic and keep me awake night after night for months on end? And then once the child arrives the worries only increase even more as Mom watches over all the scrapes and bruises, the illnesses and injuries that go along with being a typical child. And then there are those often times tough, trying, and turbulent teenage years, followed by those terribly important, life-affecting choices that come in the late teens and young adult years – things like college choice, career choice, and choice of a future spouse. And then comes the time when these children in whom we have invested so much time, energy, money, and effort must leave the nest, often times leaving a big empty hole in our

hearts. And as we go through all these gambles of raising a child, oh how we pray. We pray for their safety. We pray for their health. We pray for patience and understanding. We pray for peace in the family. We pray that they will live decent, godly, moral, and upright lives and that they will know Jesus as their Savior. We pray that they will make wise and prudent choices as they make their way through life..

As I was working on this sermon, I came across a great story of one young man who definitely depended upon the prayers of his mother. It took place during the Korean War. In one particularly fierce battle, an American soldier was shot and badly injured. He began crying out for help, but none of his comrades could get to him because he was in such a vulnerable position.

One young soldier, however, who was safely hunkered down in a foxhole, kept lifting his wrist out of the hole to catch some light off the flares that were exploding all around him so that he could see what time it was. All of a sudden he leaped from the foxhole and ran out into the open area where the wounded soldier lay. He grabbed hold of him and dragged him into his foxhole. Shortly after that, a sergeant made his way into that foxhole and demanded an explanation from the soldier for the risk he'd just taken. The soldier explained that he had been waiting and checking his watch until he knew it was 9 a.m. in his home state of Kansas. He said that before he left, his mother had promised that she would pray for him everyday at that time until he returned home. So when he knew it was 9 a.m. in Kansas and that he was covered by his mother's prayers, he gambled on rescuing his comrade – a gamble that did indeed pay off.

And sometimes that gamble of motherhood pays off in ways far greater than a mother could ever hope for or imagine. Listen carefully as I share with you one author's description of how this can happen (read "A Mother's Way," pp. 186-187 of *More Stories for the Heart*).

That takes us to the final point that I want to make this morning and that is that no earthly parent, mother or father, has ever taken a greater gamble than that which our Heavenly Parent, our Heavenly Father once took. His gamble took place on a cross nearly 2000 years ago where he gave his own Son Jesus Christ into death to pay for the sins of the entire world. He was gambling that by his death you and I and countless others would come to know and receive the gift of salvation that he offers us in Jesus. He was gambling that you and I and countless others would come to love him who first loved us. He was gambling that you and I and countless others would take this glorious good news of the Gospel and share it with others in the hopes that they too would come to know of his incredible love for a lost and sinful world. He was gambling that you and I and countless others

would respond in faith by receiving all the benefits and blessings that Jesus earned for us as our Savior.

Now we can't speak for those countless others, can we, but we can speak for ourselves. And so before I close I need to ask you a very important question: Has God's gamble paid off in your life? Have you come to truly understand and appreciate the tremendous, far-reaching love that he had and still has for you? Have you responded to that love by loving him in return and receiving by faith all that his gamble has done and made possible for you? In short, have you gambled on God, in particular Jesus Christ, for your salvation? Oh how I pray that you have because one thing I can assure you of – no, one thing he assures us of – is that that is one gamble that will definitely pay off. Amen.