Are You Playing Games With God?

Acts 5:1-11

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

We're trying to talk in a realistic way, about the way God intended us to live. It's a struggle to do it -- you know it. You usually think in a Christian country it's easy to do it. But we human beings are such miserable creatures, that we have a way of being more Christian than God, or more religious than God. We have ways of playing games with God. Loved ones, that's what we are trying to break through these Sunday mornings.

We're trying to break through all the games we play with the Lord, with the Father, and see what way He means us to live in our own everyday lives. You remember that that's what Ananias and Sapphira were doing. They were really playing games. They sold their land and so they had this land to give to God and the proceeds of it. Obviously the Holy Spirit had said give the whole lot. Old Ananias did a little calculating and decided that he would have enough for retirement if he held on to a certain amount. And so he gave the bulk to God. But the Holy Spirit had told him to give all of it to God and obviously what happened was the Holy Spirit brought about death in both him and his wife. That's what you and I are all involved in.

We feel we're pretty shrewd and sophisticated and subtle and so we all play games with God and aren't real with Him. That's why many of us do not experience the healings and the answers to prayer that are the normal experience of God's children here on earth. So what we're trying to do in these mornings is to find out how you or how I am playing games with God. You don't need me to tell you that there is going to come a moment when you can't play games anymore and you are face-to-face with Him, just like that -- and there's no longer any way in which you can escape His glance and everything is laid open before you and Him and the whole world.

So, it's essential that we do it now, that's what we are trying to do. I'll share with you a little illustration that I think I have mentioned in past years that seems to set forth what you and I have done with God over the years and what you in fact may be doing within your own life at present. There is a dad who can drive (he's done his test years ago) and a 13-year-old "little bright eyes" that is anxious to learn and get his license. So the dad says, "Okay, John let's get into the car and I'll begin to give you some driving lessons."

So, he starts to show him where the clutch is and how to put it in and let it out gently, get it into gear, turn the ignition key, and get the whole thing going. John begins to drive a little after the first two or three days watching his dad. Then his dad says, "You see you have to change a little earlier, you see we're on a hill." John says, "Yes, yes I got it, I got it." Then they go down the next piece of the road and his dad says, "Now a little more gently on the turn around there and use the brake a little to power-brake at the back." And John says, "Got it, got it".

The next day, all you can hear is John saying, "Got it, got it. Don't bother me, I got it, yes I've got it. Okay, just sit there. I'll be able to manage. I'll do it okay." And he feels he can do it himself. The dad tries to get his word in edgeways from time to time but John is beginning to get in control of this thing and he feels he knows the way.
Now, he doesn't realize that there's a mass of stuff that he doesn't know about. There are all kinds of difficulties he will get into on the freeway. There are all kinds of techniques that he has to learn when he gets onto the freeway but he doesn't know that whole area of knowledge that is out there. He just thinks, "Good, I got it, I got it. I got what you told me. I can do it myself." And he begins to drive that car more and more independent of his dad beside him. That's what we've done.

"Good, I see the way you work it. I see the way my dad worked it, earned a little money, got a few investments, built up a little background, okay, then he started a little -- yes I see how to do that. Good, I see this. I see the way my mom has managed her health. I see the kind of food you eat, good, I'll eat that kind of food. Then, I see the way you make friends and influence people." And we've got all kinds of ideas as we pass through life on how to run life ourselves and that's the way most of us operate.

We operate with a whole series of ideas that we have now got hold of for ourselves and we feel we can do it without too much reference to the dear dad that sits beside us. And we have begun to drive the car on our own by our own as the Bible says, "Our own knowledge of good and evil", we now know the good things to do and evil things to avoid, the right things to do and the bad things to do. We now have a fair idea how to run this life without constantly listening to Him telling us, which way to turn.

Now, the fact is we're like the little guy. There's a mass of knowledge out there that you and I don't understand and don't know about. We have no notion what happens after the breath stops -- not a clue and yet we know fine well that the moment the breath stops, the greater part of life begins. That's as far as we can all tell. The greater part of life is after this life. There are all kinds of things that you don't know about. All kinds of things that occur and happen to your money, to your jobs, to your own life and your own heart that bewilder you, you know that.

There's a whole wealth of knowledge of good and evil out there that we have no idea of but we've got our own little track. We've got our own little bit in Minnesota or New York or wherever we live, we have got our own little track. It's like that isn't it? You've got your own little track from your home to your office and back. Then you make little detours to play games, and then you make a little detour for vacation. But you keep on the same track and we get this little part of the world under our control. We live it pretty independent of much direction from our dear Father above.

There is a whole wealth of knowledge that we don't understand but we forget about that. We just play the little bit that we know by the knowledge that we have. Now of course as our life goes on we act like John. As he begins to get more and more confident that he can drive this car, he begins to determine that he will drive it wherever he wants. He says, "I'd like to go over there and see that even though it's down a very-very steep hill." It's winter and the dad says, "No, don't go down there." But he is so confident, he says, "Sure, I can do it. I can drive down here. I can take it wherever I want to take it." And the dad says, "No, no, don't." But he does. He makes it and manages through because the dad puts his hand on that wheel to save him, puts his hand on the brake at certain times to save him from disaster. And so the boy begins to get the feeling, "Well, I don't need to listen to him. I can really do whatever I want to with this car." He begins to drive it wherever he wants and listens less and less to his father.

As he listens less and less to him, he doesn't notice that his dad has moved from the passenger seat into the back seat. The son notices that he can't hear his father the way he used to. He used to hear him telling him what he should do but less and less is he able to hear him. He hasn't time to
look around and he certainly hasn't time to look back there. He is so preoccupied with now managing
the whole thing himself.

Then one day he looks around and there's nobody there. There is nobody there. The father was no
longer able to keep contact with him and he couldn't abide being in the car with it going all the
places that the son was taking it. It wasn't the plan that he had in mind at all, and so he actually
stepped out of the car. The boy is now in control of the car himself.

Loved ones, that's the situation that many of us have got ourselves into and that's why at times you
find it so difficult to hear God. It's because you're pretty much in control of yourself -- of your
own life. And you have certain things that you just try to determine you will not do. I mean it's
all right hearing other people going to Africa and going to India and being missionaries and all
that stuff, but you have organized God pretty well. You know the limits within which you're prepared
to serve him.

Of course the Father in Heaven knows that you are really in control. You do things with a little bit
of help from your friends. You do things with a little bit of help from God but you really don't
depend upon Him. You depend upon yourself. And of course, what many of us do is, we discover that
that's the case and we become worried. We become concerned and we desperately ask God to come back
into our lives. Many of us have done that. Many of us have taken the step, "Lord Jesus, I ask you to
come into my life and to begin to guide my life again." And God graciously has done that. He sat
beside us again and He has begun to direct us. But of course it's not long after we are born of God
or converted that we begin to do the same thing all over again.

The Lord directs us to drive the car down through a very muddy road and we decide, "Not my car. It
is clean. I want to keep it clean. I don't want any danger of denting it in any way. I am not
driving it down there. I am just not." Then we begin to get our hands on the wheel and the Father
comes up and we say, "No, no." We do this even when we can't see, even where we can't see as well as
Him. We just want to turn the wheel. We want it because we want it and we begin to discover there is
within us not only a kind of independence of Him but now an inbred will of our own that we're
surprised at ourselves. I don't know if you have ever been in that situation but you feel, I know
where I am going.

It's a bit ridiculous but if you're trying to adjust the driver's seatbelt and you're not really
looking, it's amazing that somebody beside you who is looking can say, "Look, pull it over this
way." And you say, "No", even though you can't see completely. Even though you're not absolutely
sure, you feel, "When my hands are on the wheel I am safe." So many of us begin to discover within
us willfulness, a determination to do what we want in our life even though we don't necessarily know
it's the better thing to do.

Of course what happens again is the Father begins to become less and less vocal and speaks to us
less and less. Then further along the road, we turn around and he isn't there. He's in the back seat
and then He is out again. That is what has happened to us men and women down through the centuries.
And probably is a picture of exactly what has happened in your own personal life. What we've been
sharing these Sundays is, there is only one thing to do. Stop that automobile that you're driving.

Stop your life and do not any longer invite God to get in and sit beside you. But, open the door,
get out and walk around to the other side of the car and you get into the passenger seat. Then you
say to your dear Father, "Father, You know this part of the road. You know the next part of the road
that I can’t even see. You know what you made this thing for. Lord, you get in behind the wheel and I will go where you want me to go. I will do what you want me to do the way you want me to do it. Father, you get in. This is your life. You do what you want and I'll obey you and listen to you."
That's what we're saying sooner or later has to happen.

God is the God of the whole universe. He is the God of the whole universe. You know it yourself. You're miniscule. I am less than that. We are so small. We can't even be seen beside Him. He is the God of the whole universe but you are the only version of Him that He has ever made. So He has a vested interest in you. You are not just a nothing. You're the unique version of Him that He has produced on this universe. He is anxious above all else, that you will fulfill the plan that He has in mind for your life. And He is very concerned with having the freedom to be God of your life.

But see, you have to decide that. You have to decide who is God in your life. Is God, God or are you God? It's important that you don't play games. It's important that you don't do an Ananias and Sapphira game. "Well, Lord I know you're really God and You can control my Sunday life. You can control some of my money and you can control some of my behavior. But let's face it, this is my life. I am glad you're helping me. I am glad you can deliver me in trouble. But I will live my life myself and I have a fair notion of how to do it."

It's an atheistic attitude and what the Father wants us to do is to take Him seriously. Loved ones that's all there is to it. It's letting God be the God of your whole life. Maybe I should share with you that it's very easy Sunday after Sunday to listen to this. I know you agree with it, but it's easy to agree with it and never do anything about it.

It's easy to agree with it and yet live a controlled surrender to God year after year after year. I'm sure you've been in the spot where I have been. I think, "What would I do if I were in Solzhenitsyn's position? Or what if I were in the position of some of the loved ones who must still be in Siberian prisons? What if I were in the position of some who are persecuted in other parts of the world? What would I do then?"

I have comforted myself as you probably have by saying, "Well, I am not in that position. I have been blessed by being born in this wonderful land. Thank goodness that I don't have to feel the pain of torture. I don't have to decide whether I am ready to give up my whole life and all of my possessions and home for God."

It's not real. You are being asked that. It's not a case of, are you going to get into heaven on a lower level than everybody else? It's simply that God is asking you that. He is asking you to come to a place in your heart where you have settled that whatever He would ask you to do, you will do it. See, that's why it's possible. I don't know if some of you read "The Gulag Archipelago", but the tortures are hideous. They're almost impossible to conceive, but do you see that they have won before they won -- those guys and those ladies.

They have won before they've won. I mean they have settled before they went into the torture chamber. They have already settled. All that is over and done with, "Lord, You can have my body, you can have my possessions, and you can have my whole life." They've won before they fight the battle. That's what we are saying. Even if you are not being tried by the KGB, even if your job is not on the line, it is on the line because the Lord is saying, "Would you start all over again with me? Would you start your life all over again?"
If you are like me, I am sure that some of you who are beginning to get life together say, "Thank goodness He won't mean me. He'll mean these young kids who are just starting off, that He won't mean me." He does mean me. He means you and me. Everyone who can hear this still in their heart, everybody who is not so dead that they can't hear it, everybody who can still hear in their heart what I am saying -- He does mean you.

If you say to me, "Well, do you think He is going to ask me to go to Africa or India? Do you think He is going to get me to give up my job and give up my social security and all that stuff?" I don't know what He is going to say to you. But you see what He is saying today is, "Would you come to the place in your heart where you're playing so straight with Him that that would be no problem to you. "Of course Lord, if You want me to give up my plans for my future, if You want me to give up my home, if You want me to give up my comfort, I'll do whatever You want." That's it. That's what He wants from us. I'd say lovingly to those of us who are more than 50, more than 60, more than 70, He is saying the same thing to us. All He is saying is, "Am I God? Am I God of your life? Have I the right to do what I want with your life?"

Brothers and sisters, I'd point out to you that if you say no, there's nothing we can say on the Day of Judgment. Let's just talk as people in the same boat here. There's nothing we can say a moment after death if we take that attitude -- there's not. You and I will just go up before His throne. He won't need to say a thing. Our hypocrisy, our Ananias and Sapphira "hold onto what we need attitude" will fill our hearts and minds so much that we will just sneak away. We'll know what he is thinking. We'll know what the whole world is thinking.

There's only one way to live in God's world and that's with God being the God of your whole life. If you say to me, "Well, what would He ask me to do?" That really doesn't matter. It really doesn't matter. Only He knows that but you can know in your heart if you have given it all over to Him. If you're sitting there and saying, "Well, I can't" -- well, you can. What about your money, your stocks and shares, what about those? What about your future? What about your marriage? What about your job? What about your home? Would you be ready to give that up to him? If you were to go and live in some little rented apartment in some city in Africa, would you be willing to do that?

See, it's not hard. You just deal with those things and determine, are you willing? That's what God is saying to us today. Here's the thing: unless you come to that place where you put Him in the driver's seat behind the wheel, you'll never hear His voice. You'll never know what He wanted you to do, that's it.

A dear person here in this room said, "It's amazing isn't it, the way God hides Himself from the people who wouldn't obey Him anyway." It's interesting how God lovingly hides Himself, because they couldn't bear the pain of His presence. He hides Himself from those who wouldn't obey Him anyway. And so you can't know what God wants you to do until you have said to Him plainly, "I am willing to do it. I am willing to do anything. I am willing to surrender all and Lord it is your life. I give it to you with all my heart to do what you want with." Now that's a heart decision. It needs only to be between you and God but it's a heart decision that enables Him to start changing your life. This is an ordinary Sunday and you can make the decision very plainly and with common sense today. If you're wanting to know what will happen, that's you still trying to be God. Giving everything up to God is letting Him at last be God.

So I would ask if there is one of you that has been a bit of an Ananias or a Sapphira -- hedging the bets, and holding back some of the stuff. Why? What are you going to do with the extra money? What
are you going to do? How are you going to buy a new body? We're so dumb, we're pitiful, and we're pathetic. It doesn't make any sense. But Satan so deceives us that he gets us to do stuff that is absolutely stupid. What are you going to do with the stuff you hold back? What are you going to be able to trade it in for?

If you lose your job and you lose your home and you lose your career and you lose your marriage and you're trusting Him then you've still got everything. But if you give Him a pittance and hold on to something for yourself for a rainy day, you've got nothing. That's because anything can sweep across you and wipe out 30 rainy days' worth of savings.

Anyway you know it yourselves. You build up the money, you build up the reputation, you build up the career, and at the end it goes like that. It just goes like that. And actually you know it yourselves. You've met people who have not made sufficient provision. And you've met other people that have made plenty of provision. One can be still alive living in a remarkable degree of happiness with the little that they have and the other can be dead and all the stuff is passed on to somebody else.

So Satan mesmerizes us with the thing you see. So step out of it. You can. You can step out of it today. Just quietly in your own place there, make your peace with God and say, "Lord God, I have treated you as a consultant up to this moment in my life. I have treated you as an advisor. Lord this is wrong. You are God and I am the creature. You know what I am here for. I ask you to blow away out of my mind all the pre-suppositions I have, all the things that I feel I couldn't do. Lord, I'll do whatever you tell me to do from now on. I ask you to come in and to sit behind the steering wheel in this life of mine and you drive. I'll sit here in the passenger seat and I'll go where you want. You just take over." That's it, loved ones, that's what it means. Let us pray.

Dear Father, we repent of running our own lives. We repent of trying to have a bit of you and a bit of everything else. We repent of wanting to share the guidance of our lives with you. We repent of wanting to be able to negotiate a good deal. We repent of discussing alternatives and modifications instead of obeying you blindly and blankly. We repent Lord of adopting the normal wisdom of this world in regard to our right to our own lives. And Lord God, we acknowledge that we are not our own. We have been bought with a price and that the only thing that will continue to exist after this world is over is that which has been destroyed in Jesus and recreated in Him.

Lord God, we toss our hat into the ring. We throw our life onto the altar of the Cross. We say "Lord God, You take it now, run it and bring it back into line with your plan. We will obey you and trust you. Lord where we have possessions like Ananias and Sapphire -- either in our own reputation or our possessions or property -- we tell You Lord, we want to sell it all in our hearts. We want to give it all and not keep anything back in our hearts. Then Lord, we know that you'll be free to tell us what you really want us to do.

So Father we come now in the name of Jesus, (who bore all the pain to wipe us out and start us all new over again) and we ask you because of Jesus now to take us. Take us again under your dear arms and under your wing. Lord, live this life the way You wanted to live in the first place -- whatever that means for us. Now the grace of our Lord Jesus and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit are with each one of us now and evermore. Amen.