

BET YOUR LIFE FOR THE GUARANTEED WIN

"You got to know when to hold 'em, know when to fold 'em, know when to walk away, know when to run," sang country music star Kenny Rogers in his 1978 signature hit, "The Gambler." There is truth in that crusty, card shark philosophy, both for card playing and for life in general. But knowing when to walk away or run from gambling is likely getting harder as online betting sites proliferate and alluring promotions for them infiltrate televised sports and other media.

I do not speak the language of the odds makers, but it is obvious that the bait to is bet small and win big, maybe even to bet on a long shot, grasping for a highly unlikely windfall. The temptation can be strong and the risks high, a perilous situation that leads many into financial trouble and even addiction, with all its destructive, compound repercussions. Some readers know this scenario all too well, and can find help for themselves or a loved one through resources like the National Council on Problem Gambling (1-800-GAMBLER), or Gamblers Anonymous (www.gamblersanonymous.org).

Other readers may find gambling completely foreign or unappealing. But we are all betting on something, and the stakes couldn't be higher.

As we go through our days, we may not gamble in the usual sense of the word, but we do make wagers with the resources we have, hoping for some kind of win. We take chances, perhaps based on calculated risk, perhaps on a mere hunch, hoping for a payoff.

Generally, it's win some, lose some, and life goes on. But one day it won't. And where have we placed our bet then?

What are we staking our life on, both now and for our eternal future? By God's abundant mercy and incomparable love, there is one surefire bet, with a 100 percent chance of hitting the jackpot, and an unlimited number of winners. This is guaranteed by Jesus Christ himself, the One in whom that all-or-nothing bet must be placed.

While everyone naturally wonders what lies ahead when we die, He has provided the clear answer for those who put their trust in Him. As his earthly life was drawing to a close, He reassured his followers, "Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also" (John 14:1-4).

Later, on the eve of his death, Jesus prayed, "Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory" (John 17:24). The odds that Jesus' prayer will be denied are zero in a zillion, as He and the Father are supernaturally one (e.g., John 14:10).

We do not know all the specifics of what that eternal future with Jesus will be like; and we do risk everything -- relationships, livelihood, reputation, personal aspirations, even our mortal life -- if we decide to follow Him in the meantime. But truly, life with Jesus is no gamble: "These things are written down that you may

know that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:31).

Those who place that sure bet, anteing up ourselves and everything we have -- all of our time, talent, and treasure -- have a hope laid up for us in heaven (Colossians 1:5). So "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful" (Hebrews 10:23).

With love in the Lord,
The Rev. Christine Maddux