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Just as Australians are enthusiastic about footy or cricket, Americans fervently follow American football. In American football, the quarterback is one of the most important positions; he is the leader of a team’s offensive play.

[picture #1]



In this picture, the red line indicates the defensive team, while the white line is the offensive team. And the player in the yellow circle is the quarterback, stationed directly behind the offensive line. As soon as the quarterback gets the ball from the center, the defensive linemen rush to attack the quarterback so that he cannot pass the ball comfortably like this.

[picture #2]



At that time, all the offensive linemen block the attack and protect the passer. Like in this picture, in the case of a right-handed quarterback he cannot see his left side properly when he tries to pass. We call it the blind side. So the role of the number 77 player called left tackle is critical; the left tackle defends the blind spot of the quarterback. Normally the best lineman in a team is positioned as the left tackle.

I would like to introduce an American football player Michael Oher who belongs to Carolina Panthers. He is a very famous figure as he is one of the best left tackles in America. In addition, he has earned an even greater reputation because of a film, “the Blind Side”, released in 2009.

The movie is about his real story. Michael was a homeless boy due to his mother’s drug addiction. Whenever he was placed in a new home, he ran away to find his mother. He had to pick up leftover food, and spend nights outside shivering in the cold. Later, Michael happened to become a friend of a younger student, Sean Jr.

One winter night Sean’s mother, Leigh, drove past Michael as he was trying to find somewhere to sleep. But she couldn’t pass him by and offered to let him sleep in her house. From that day on, Michael and Leigh’s Christian family began to build up a good relationship and he was adopted as a member of the family.

Leigh and her family supported him as much as possible willingly spending their time and money. One of the most impressive scenes was when Michael was trained as an offensive tackle. In spite of his physical strength, his tackle ability wasn’t improved because of his gentle character.

At that, Leigh told him, “Michael. Protect your quarterback like your family. As you want to guard us, keep him from any harm.” Since then, Michael improved dramatically enough to be a best player at the college level, and was drafted in the first round of the 2009 National Football League draft in America.

[picture #3]



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The message of this film is clear, ‘Protect the weakest spots of your neighbour like you would for your family.’ Leigh and her family secured Michael’s defenceless area, which totally transformed Michael’s life as well as their lives. Their amazing story reminded me of Jesus’ teaching, “Love your neighbour as you love yourself.”

For Jesus, to love one’s neighbour meant to safeguard their blind zone, which requires our sacrifice and commitment. Jesus was always interested in people’s unguarded area, let them see the impact coming, and helped them overcome those hardships by standing beside them.

Today’s Gospel reading is a very precious and meaningful narrative regarding this topic. One day Jesus met a man sightless from birth. He felt compassionate towards him, and healed him by opening his eyes. In this story, however, the way he cured the man was a bit strange.

According to verse 6, Jesus spat on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and spread the mud over the blind man’s eyes. And he told him, “Go wash yourself in the pool of Siloam.” You know, Jesus could have healed him just with a word as he did in many other places, but he used an odd way here.

The blind man obeyed what Jesus told him; he went to the pool, washed, and came back seeing. Interestingly, this story didn’t stop at the healing news unlike other miracle cases. After his eyesight was restored, many people asked him, “Who healed you? What happened?”

He told them, “The man they call Jesus made mud and spread it over my eyes and told me, ‘Go to the pool of Siloam and wash yourself.’ So I went and washed, and now I can see.” Because of this answer, he was taken to the Pharisees for further investigation since it was on the Sabbath that Jesus had made the mud and healed him.

The Pharisees refused to believe what he said to them, and questioned him again and again in an oppressive atmosphere to get what they wanted to hear. They even called in his parents to make a rumour against the man and Jesus. The Pharisees did everything to stop the crowd from believing in Jesus as the Messiah.

And finally, they threw the man out of the synagogue, that is, out of their community. Here, we need to focus on the fact that they weren't interested in the man's feeling. He was blind from birth, but now he could see. However, no one was happy with him. They were just keen to find out how Jesus violated the Sabbath Law and how to prevent people from praising Jesus by oppressing the man.

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Their responses were almost the same as those of the people around Michael Oher. No one tried to understand Michael's feeling when he was forcibly separated from his mother. Instead, they were blaming his running away from new guardians and his homeless life, and worrying about him being a bad influence on their children.

No one was concerned about his vulnerable condition until Leigh and her family appeared. The poor man in the Scripture faced a similar crisis. His life situation was entirely changed, but there were few people with whom he shared his happiness. His blind spot wasn't removed at all even with his restored eyesight. Rather, his helplessness became more striking; he became more vulnerable with being expelled from his community.

What's remarkable is that Jesus was there with him; when Jesus heard what had happened, he found the man to defend his blind spot again. At first, Jesus removed his physical blindness. And now, he protected the man's communal vulnerability by opening his spiritual eyes.

At the second encounter with Jesus, the man finally believed in Jesus as the Messiah and worshipped him. He was rejected from his synagogue, which turned to a blessing entering into the family of God.

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Sisters and brothers,

Likewise, Jesus is our friend who has been screening our weakest points. He is like the best tackle enabling us to enjoy our life and complete our missions

comfortably in our journey. Yes, there is none like him for us, so trust him. He will keep us from any danger or hurt. Thus, Lenny LeBlanc sang like this:

There is none like You,
No one else can touch my heart like You do,
I can search for all eternity Lord
And find, there is none like You.

Your mercy flows like a river wide,
And healing comes from Your hand.
Suffering children are safe in Your arms,
There is none like You.

I hope that we all can confess like that. Furthermore, I would like to mention that we are also responsible for protecting our neighbours' blind side as Jesus did to us. This is one of the most important teachings that we Christians should remember and fulfil in following in Jesus' footsteps.

If we aren't concerned about others' weakness like the Pharisees, Jesus will say to us as he did to the religious group, “If you were blind, you wouldn't be guilty. But you remain guilty because you claim you can see.” Amen.