

BASEBALL AS LIFE

Text: Philippians 3:12-14
LHUMC 9/22/13

I. Introduction

A. I am convinced that Paul was a sports fan

1. I chose today's passage from a number of passages in which he used a sport of his own time as a metaphor for faith, discipleship, and the church. In this passage, it was running a marathon, which was an established and popular sport of his time.
2. So I think we're okay doing the same thing with baseball today, because if there had been baseball in Paul's time, I have little doubt he would have used it to make his point once in a while also.

B. Also, I should probably expand the title of the message to "Baseball as life...in the Church" because that's what I want to talk about briefly.

II. I come at this topic from some experience—I played a ton of baseball growing up all the way through high school, and since then have had some experience in youth baseball as a coach and umpire. And I've always been a huge fan. So I want to talk a little about how baseball relates to life in the church from both perspectives—as a player and as a fan.

A. First, as a player, here are some thoughts about how playing baseball as a part of a team is like being a part of the church.

1. On a baseball team and in the church, every player is important.
 - a) From a defensive perspective, I can be the best shortstop in the world, but the reality is that during a game, there are relatively few balls that are hit to me.
 - b) The vast majority of the balls are hit to my other eight teammates. If they aren't holding up their end—if they are booting every ball hit their way, we won't have a very good team.
 - c) From an offensive perspective, I can be like Miguel Cabrera and hit home runs all the time, but if there's no one on base, and everyone else on the team is hitting .200, then again, we won't have a very good team.
 - d) When I was a kid, there was a year when Dave Kingman led the league in home runs and the Cubs still lost 100 games and finished in last place. So I've seen it happen.

- e) In the church, every player is important. In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul uses the image of the body to make the point that every part of the body is important.
 - f) That's one of the places where if he had had baseball, he might have said that instead of the right hand being as important as any other part, he might have said the right fielder is as important as any other player.
 - g) We are all in this together, and more than that, we are all equally important.
2. Which leads to a related thought, that in baseball and in the church the players on the bench are important too.
 - a) This time of year, when a team like the Tigers is in a pennant race, it is said that depth is everything.
 - b) Those everyday players get tired about now, so you better have some good players to take over at least once in a while.
 - c) In a church, those who do the work can get tired and burned out as well if we don't have depth! Other folks willing to step in.
 3. On a baseball team, the players "pick each other up".
 - a) So when a player fails to do something, like lay down a bunt to move a player along to the next base, or drive in a runner from third base, if the next guy up gets the job done then we say "he picked that first player up."
 - b) In the church, we actually know a lot about what it means to "pick each other up."
 - c) We do it all the time, through prayer, and our meal ministry, and hospital visits, etc.
- B. As a fan—A couple of thoughts
1. It takes patience to be a baseball fan.
 - a) And that is true both in the short-term and long term.
 - 1) It's been said that football has replaced baseball as our country's favorite spectator sport because we don't have a long enough attention span any more for baseball.
 - 2) It takes patience to watch a ball game. Sometimes the pace gets pretty slow, like when that relief pitcher takes about three minutes between pitches, or a batter fouls off seven straight pitches, or the game goes into extra innings.
 - 3) For me, that is often just what I need. I tend to enjoy watching baseball the most when I need to slow down.
 - 4) That particular unique rhythm that baseball is therapeutic for me at those times when life is moving too fast.

- 5) Watching baseball can be kind of like taking a deep, relaxing breath.
 - 6) And then in the long term, if you follow certain teams, like my favorite team, you learn about patience when your team goes over one hundred years (and counting) in between winning the world series.
 - 7) Say what you want about Cub fans, but we know two things—suffering and patience. Job from the Bible has nothing on us!
2. Which leads to the other thing I like about being a baseball fan, and that has to do with what it teaches all of us about adversity.
 - a) Just like the reality that the best hitters in baseball actually fail seven out of ten times at bat, the best teams lose two games for every three that they win.
 - b) In other words, show me a team that wins three out of five, and I'll show you a team that at the very least makes the playoffs.
 - c) So even the best teams know about adversity and they know that you can't win every day.
 - d) In baseball, there is always the attitude of "tomorrow's another day."
 3. Life is kind of like that too—sometimes things are going great, other times, not so much.
 4. And as for our individual discipleship, as Jesus makes clear, we have to expect some adversity once in a while. It is inevitable that we won't win every day.
 5. The question is whether we can pick ourselves up and step up to the plate the next time, with the faith to know that Jesus is still with us, forgiving us in our failures and urging us forward to the next opportunity.
- III. So that's my summary of how baseball is like life and especially like life in the church. I know we have a lot of baseball fans here today, I'd be interested in getting your insights of how our American pastime resonates with you. And now, since "Take Me Out to the Ballgame" isn't in the hymnal (although based on what we just talked about, maybe it should be), we'll sing our closing hymn together.

