

LET THIS MIND BE IN YOU
Philippians 2: 1-11

Just about 10 years ago I was working with the Theological Education Fund of our Presbyterian Church (USA) , inviting congregations to support our 10 Theological Seminaries. We also met each year at a different seminary across our country. One year we were meeting at Dubuque Theological Seminary in Iowa. We landed at the airport and were transported by a fellow TEF representative in a van. As we were driving toward Dubuque we passed a sign that said “Dyersville, 5 miles, Field of Dreams.” I said to our driver, “I will probably never be here again and our meetings don’t start until this evening. Could we detour over to see the “Field of Dreams? You know, the actual place the movie was shot?” A sigh came up from the driver. No one else in the van seemed interested. “Ok” he said, not sure what he was agreeing for us to see. So we went. And we drove through many cornfields and by many barns until ... there it was! I could see it! It looked just like I imagined it. The farmhouse; the corn; the baseball field; the tiny stands. All surrounded by corn. We pulled up. No admission. A sign said, “This field has been left for you to find peace, or ‘have a catch,’ or imagine. Donations are accepted for the upkeep of the field, and we have a small gift shop next to the house. Enjoy.” I stood; I imagined; I remembered the scenes in the film; and I took lots of pictures- they were on my pre-smart phone camera so they are now gone. But my memories aren’t. That reminded me of two baseball stories about humbleness- a topic that I think Paul might have been preaching to himself. Often I preach to myself and on that occasion, when Paul was describing Jesus humbling himself in such a profound and painful way, I think it moved him, and instead of boasting that he was a Jew, or a Christian, or a Roman citizen, he found himself arrested in prison. And he was humbled. Listen to what he wrote from the classic King James translation: “Let this mind be in you that was also in Christ Jesus, who,

being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon himself the form of a servant ...and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross.” (verses 5-8) That was Paul’s example. That should be *our* example too.

Today, as I said, I’m thinking about humbleness and humility with two baseball stories. One concerned a father at a little league game. It was the bottom of the sixth inning with the home team in the lead. The first batter got a hit and was on first base. As the father looked on, his son stepped up to the plate. The first pitch was a ball-no swing. The second pitch was a strike-no swing! The third pitch was a strike-no swing! The father joined with the crowd in chanting. “Come on batter! Be a hitter! Guard the plate!” The fourth pitch was a ball-no swing. “Good eye, batter, good eye” was the chant from the stands. Still the batter had yet to swing! Would he get out without swinging? Was his head even in the game? Was he afraid to hit? The father was getting worked up. The next pitch would be crucial. The father shouted, “Ok son, you’re a hitter now! Be a hitter!” Then the pitch: the ball hit the catcher’s mitt. “Strike three, the batter’s out!” the umpire shouted. What was the father feeling? Humiliated? Mad? Sad? Mercifully the game soon ended. As they got into the car, the boy said, “Dad, do you know what happened with my last at bat?” “You didn’t swing,” the father replied. “Yeah, Dad,” his son said. Every time the pitcher threw me a strike, my coach gave me the ‘take the pitch’ signal. And each time he gave the ‘swing away!’ signal, it was a ball. There wasn’t a single good pitch I was allowed to hit!” *What the father had seen as failure was really faithfulness, following his coach’s instructions.* Dad ate a big piece of humble pie for dinner that night.

Seventy-four years ago, a minor league player who played baseball in Daytona Beach in the very ballpark that bears his name was playing for the Brooklyn Dodgers. Brooklyn fans were usually vocal about players they didn't like, and now Jackie Robinson, the first African American to be in the major leagues, was on their team. Some players were not pleased about that. Team president and general manager Branch Rickey told Jackie, "You have to act in a humble fashion at all times, staying calm no matter what. I don't know if you'll have the guts not to fight back. But you cannot fight back." Jackie Robinson ended up with stomach ulcers and other health issues during his life, but he accepted Branch Rickey's terms to play. He got jeered from players and fans. But he kept his word. He was an example of stalwart humbleness on the field, acting like no words could break his bones or his spirit. But it took a toll.

There are people throughout history who were not braggarts in any way; they acted humbly. There were people who were following signals from a higher power.. Jesus was the pinnacle person, listening to his Heavenly Father. Other classic examples in the 20th century were Mahatma Ghandi who led a nation with peaceful resistance. Martin Luther King Jr. led people of color in peaceful resistance too.

Many years ago the Apostle Paul shared his views about Jesus that eluded the secular crowds he faced in Phillipi. Jesus humbled himself. Jesus was expected to enter Jerusalem as a warrior; he didn't. He was expected to enter on a white horse with a sword drawn; he wouldn't. The only sword he would use was the sword of the living Word of God that issued from his mouth. Paul reminded the Philippians that Jesus did not try to be equal to God. Instead, he took the path of obedience and faithfulness which led to his death on a cross. To the crowds he looked like he had failed. But they couldn't know that Jesus was following the signals from his

coach—his Heavenly Father. Because Jesus listened to his Father, he was highly exalted. Scripture says his name is now above every other name. “At the name of Jesus, every knee should bow, and every tongue confess that he is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

Whether a baseball crowd stops cheering and starts jeering; whether a Jerusalem crowd stopped cheering and started grumbling; whether the public cheers about vaccines in 2020 have now turned into gripes about them, or whether military decisions are being second guessed by commentators or crowds in front of TV sets, we offer better reactions by cheering others on, not by jeering them. We are not in the know about what signals the coach is sending in to the players. We are in the stands; or in the crowds; or on our devices. But in the Bible, the Father-Son team had a plan all along, a plan the human race tried to thwart. Let’s let coaches coach; let parents be cheer; let’s let leaders lead; let’s let medical staff guide; and let military troops listen to commanders instead of the crowds. Salvation came to the world even as disciples thought they should save their master from the cross. Salvation is in the hands of God, now as always. Follow Jesus’ example.

Let us pray: Dear Heavenly Father: how could humans have known that you and your Son had a salvation plan? How can we learn what to do and what not to do as members of the human race? Guide our feet, our hearts, and our actions, we pray, O God, and in so doing, grant us your peace. Amen.

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