

For the Love of the Game

Christ the Redeemer Church
June 6, 2010
Second Sunday after Pentecost

Luke 7:11-17
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What a week of baseball.

Tuesday night our church softball team played in the city Open League Championship game, after shocking everyone and winning all of our games and remaining undefeated to get to the Trophy game.

We got behind 5-0 in the first inning and came back to take the lead 8-7 in the 4th inning. Then things got ugly. The other team, which we had already beaten once last week to put them into the Loser's bracket, switched balls and put in an illegal ball. A "hot" ball. A softball that shoots off the bat like a baseball. Balls began to shoot off of their bats like missiles. Our best players were dodging the very dangerous hot balls just to protect themselves on the small softball infield.

I protested throughout the rest of the game, even rolling the "juiced up" ball back to the umpire and back to the opposing team's dugout several times. The ball looks normal and has the right dimensions and ASA (American Softball Association) markings. But it has been juiced up illegally. You can do that by either cooking it in a microwave or by taking the cover off, putting illegal insides into the ball, and then restitching it back up.

I almost walked off the pitcher's mound and forfeited the game in protest.

We lost by two runs against an illegal ball. I was furious. Not at losing but at having to play against cheaters.

Daniel got A's in German IV and English and B's in other difficult courses. He got a poor grade in History. I saw and took one of his freshman History tests just to see what he was going through. It was a terrible test and I love and excel at History. Once I realized how insane the test was (based on opinions of the professor and not on historical facts) I asked him how anyone in the class passed it.

"Some of them cheat." I told him how proud I was that he did not cheat. A poor grade is better than a good grade obtained by cheating. Amity was the same way. She received a few D's in college classes that were taught poorly rather than do what some other classmates did...cheat. The only time I called Auburn University was the time I called the Dean at Auburn from The Netherlands and told him that some very serious things were going on in a classroom that was being led by an idiot professor. The Dean, much to my surprise, agreed with me and told me I was not the first one to call him. I told him Amity had been wrongly dropped involuntarily from a class and accused of cheating. I told him to take one look at her college transcript and tell me if those grades are grades of someone

cheating. You don't get a "D" in a class if you are cheating. Amity was a strong "B" student but a D or two was peppered in there. Professor called me back the next day, said he had removed the interim professor from the class, he had reinstated Amity and five others wrongly dropped from class back into the class, and that he had taken over the class himself for the rest of the semester. He had a problem and he fixed it. I was so proud of him for making the right call.

Wednesday night in Major League Baseball something happened that even the non-baseball world is talking about. One sportswriter said:

"The Tigers' Armando Galarraga had retired 26 straight batters. Then Cleveland's Jason Donald hit a grounder to first-baseman Miguel Cabrera. Cabrera tossed to Galarraga, who beat Donald in a routine race to the bag. Galarraga raised his arms in triumph. The young pitcher had just thrown only the 21st perfect game in Major League history and first ever perfect in 100-plus years of Detroit Tigers' baseball.

That's what Galarraga thought, anyway. Umpire Jim Joyce? Not so much. He called Donald safe, touching off a firestorm that will change the sport."

What do you do when life, or an umpire, robs you of part of your life? What do you do when the judgment and decisions of others are unfair, even visibly unfair and wrong, to you?

Galarraga grinned in disbelief. He had been robbed from history due to the human error of the umpire. He grinned when he got the runner out, knowing that he had joined the elite group of only 20 pitchers EVER who had thrown a Perfect Game. Then the umpire signaled SAFE and Galarraga's grin turned to shock. On TV. The stadium was stunned. Shocked.

The umpire Jim Joyce after the game reviewed the films and realized he had robbed the kid of a Perfect Game.

When have you been robbed by bad calls of others? When has Life robbed you? It happens to us all. Just not on national TV.

Jim went and apologized to Amando. Armando went on TV and said, "We are all human. We make mistakes. The umpire made a mistake."

The kid LOVES the game. And the Game comes includes Human Error. I voted at first for the Commissioner of Baseball to overturn the bad call and to give the Kid his Perfect Game. Commissioner would not do it and I was one of the ones who called for the Commissioner to be fired. On the internet I called for his head.

Now I agree with the Commissioner. That is the beauty of Baseball. It is human. Clean rules. But Humans call the game. Not machines. Humans. For the Love of the Game we

keep it all Human.

Baseball is so much life Life. And you can not go BACK and redo Life. We live with our decisions. We live with our disappointments. We can not change a call made.

Thursday night on national TV Jim the ump who blew the call was now the home plate umpire. He joined the other umpires for the pre-game ritual, waiting for the teams to bring their line-up cards to the plate. Everyone was shocked when Armando walked to the plate to hand in the Tiger's line-up card. The ump who robbed the Kid of his Perfect Game and the Kid shook hands. The umpire teared up.

I have never seen an Umpire cry.

God cries when we are robbed in life. God cries when we hurt. God cries when life robs us of our joy and hands us pain and disappointment.

But we go on because we so Love the Game of Life. I have been fighting this illegal and juiced up softball usage for 7 years here in San Marcos.

I wrote a long letter to the city on Wednesday, telling them someone is going to get killed on the field by a hot and illegal ball that will strike someone in the head and kill them. I recommended that the city of San Marcos do what other cities and other tournaments do...make it mandatory for all teams in tournament play to buy softballs at the tournament so that all teams use the same balls and so that no one can juice up a ball.

The city recreation department elevated my letter to city authorities, the city elevated it to national ASA authorities, and by Thursday night the city announced at the summer coaches meeting that from now on there is a new policy in the city. All teams in post-season play will have to purchase softballs from the city at the ballpark. That will eliminate any chance of illegal and juiced up balls from entering the games. We lost the game Tuesday, won the war, and protected future players from potential and lethal injury.

For the Love of The Game. We are taking 16 youth to Glorieta this week to help shape them into humans who can make right decisions in life. To not cheat. To own one's actions. To apologize when we err and rob another human being of something.

I have here 9 hand made wooden crosses to hand the 9 youth who attended Glorieta last year. In the center of each cross is a mustard seed. Don made these for you last year. I kept them for today to give you. This week will change your life. Faith is like a mustard seed. You only need a little bit. And it will grow up and change your life on the field and off.

God gives us Life and gives us a chance to learn from our mistakes and to know that God loves us enough to trust us with this thing called Life. Ah, I love the Game called Life. It is a gift for us humans to enjoy, make errors in, learn to forgive and cry, and to enjoy.

With a smile on our faces, like Armando...the Kid who was robbed.

Amen.