

Two First Pitches

Christ the Redeemer Church
May 9, 2010
6th Sunday of Easter/Mother's Day

John 14:23-29
Rev Gary L. Smith
www.christredeemerchurch.com

I pray you hear the Gospel today.

A pious soul who dies, goes to heaven, and gains an audience with the Virgin Mary. The visitor asks Mary why, for all her blessings, she always appears in paintings as a bit sad, a bit wistful: Is everything O.K.?

Mary reassures her visitor: "Oh, everything's great. No problems. It's just ... it's just that we had always wanted a daughter."

I have laughed at that joke all week while preparing this Mother's Day sermon. It made my week. It will sink in slowly during this sermon.

I could not wait to throw out the ceremonial First Pitch a week ago Friday at the University of Tennessee verses University of Kentucky televised NCAA baseball game at the University of Tennessee.

Daniel is the one who came up with the idea of catching my first pitch. I was so focused on my life and my thrill of pitching the first pitch that I never even thought of including him in my fun. I told him I had to go warm up in the bullpen and he asked me if he could come along. I said sure.

I had waited and dreamed of pitching college ball for over 50 years. Today was my day. Daniel tagged along and was grinning as much as I was when we walked into the Tennessee dugout and met the players and coaches. I was in military uniform (ran out of time to go change) and it was fun to introduce myself and to introduce Daniel to the coaches and players. Everyone was excited for me. My mother and brother Dave from Ohio were there. Pam was there. Air Force friends were there. Amity and Will from Alabama were there.

Daniel asked if he could catch me in warm-ups. I never thought about that because I was focused on me. I was nervous -- for the first time in years I was nervous as I don't get performance anxiety anymore as I got used to flopping long ago in life. So Daniel and I borrowed two gloves and a baseball from the team and we walked down to the bullpen to warm up.

It was so much fun. I threw balls about 85 miles per hour. Daniel was shocked at how hard I threw and how accurate I was from 60 feet 6 inches of throwing strikes that stung his hand. He and I had never thrown like that. I was fired up.

Daniel asked me if he could catch my first pitch. I asked the person coordinating the event and the television timing and coverage if Daniel could catch me. The guy said Daniel could catch me. Daniel grinned.

This was my moment in life.

Bobette said “I am looking forward to being “Queen for a day.” Enjoy today. “I leave you Peace; my Peace I give you.” Peace to all women. You did and are doing the best you can do in life in being a woman and in being a mother. All women are mothers, as Sarah so beautifully said in her prayer this morning. All women give birth to some idea, some person, some career, some new church, and some concept. God is the one who teaches us that life is not to be limited to the biological. Life and Creation are spiritual.

Oh, we all would love a second chance at doing some things in life, like parenting. Or to do over our choices.

Mike Young wrote me this week and congratulated me on my 26th Anniversary of being Ordained: *Seems like I wrote a note congratulating you on your ordination anniversary about two weeks ago! It's hard to believe that another year has gone by that quickly. Hope it's been a good year for you. Isn't it amazing that at the marking of such times as these we tend to remember only the best and the worst parts? Some of the most significant moments passed by almost unnoticed: The little decisions we made that had big consequences. The little missteps that led us on a completely new journey.*

Every day in those 116 years (No, those 28 years) contained a thousand choices that we never remember that brought us to where we are today. Congratulations for making more good choices than bad ones!

Congratulations on making more good choices than bad ones. I say the same to each of you parents and children this morning.

Do overs. Mulligans. Don't we all wish for a chance for some *do overs* in parenting and in relationships and in life?

They asked me if I wanted to stand in front of the mound to get closer to the plate or if I was going to throw from the full 60 feet 6 inches. I was offended...I was throwing from the real mound.

When my moment came, Daniel knelt behind the plate and gave me the target. This was my moment. I stood on the rubber, shook off two signs...this was my moment. No ceremonial first pitcher ever shakes off a sign. I wound up, in full military uniform, and got my money's worth. I held nothing back. I fired the ball as hard as I could, about 85 miles an hour, straight at Daniel's glove.

It was a slider. It broke at the knees, dropped down into the dirt. Shawn Kitchin had been placing bets as to whether or not my pitch would be in the dirt or not. One guy said, “I looked good half way to the plate!” My ball hit the dirt and shot past Daniel. Before they

could yank me off the mound, I yelled to Daniel “Throw me the ball!” He did.

I pitched a second first pitch before they could yank me off the mound. People were quiet and stunned when I wound up making a SECOND first pitch! I got my money’s worth. This was my moment. Shawn and everyone else in the stands were cracking up. My second pitch was 88 miles per hour...and flew over Daniel’s head into the net protecting the fans from foul balls! No way could Daniel catch either pitch.

My mom was in the stands. She and Pam have seen me fail publicly on the ball field and off. My two pitches reminded me of that great John Wesley quote: "Catch on fire with enthusiasm and people will come (from miles) and watch you burn."

Tom Bartels says this quote made him understand my success in ministry...that I catch on fire with enthusiasm and folks just come to watch me burn. So funny!

I wish I could have one of those two pitches back. You know why? Because my two bad pitches robbed Daniel of his one chance to CATCH a ball on a university baseball field. I was so focused on it being MY day that I threw so hard and wild that Daniel never got to catch the ball.

You know what Daniel said to me? He said, “I should have caught that first pitch in the dirt.”

No, I should have taken some speed off the ball and thrown it better. He said he should have caught it. We talked about it for hours. I have wished all week I could have back one of those two first pitches.

He never blamed me and I never blamed him. Parents, don’t blame your kids. Kids, don’t blame your parents. God, we had fun. What a moment. And Amity, who loves baseball and who loves her father and her brother and her mother so much, captured it all on camera, laughing all the time. God, it was fun being with those two that day. God, thank you. God, it was so much fun. I got my money’s worth!

Amen.