

SERMONS FROM ST. FRANCIS

The Resurrection of Our Lord

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God's Grand Slam

Texts: John 20:1-18

When I was a kid I loved to play cricket. With friends from the neighborhood we would find a cricket bat, a ball and set up two trash cans as wickets -- much like four cans as bases in baseball -- which, of course, is a heretical corruption of pure cricket.

But I have come to realize that God has called me not only to the joys of ministry and to the rains of San Francisco, God has also called me to join the longsuffering Giants fans of this congregation. Having been a Cubs fan for 15 years I am truly prepared for any long haul. Now you may be wondering where I am going with this sermon. But I beg you to be patient -- as patient as any Giants fan.

I want you to imagine that Christianity is like baseball -- obviously in a special way. Imagine it is Good Friday and the bases are loaded. On first base are those among us who hold that they must understand the Christian faith before they'll run with it. Every belief is to be understood before they will believe.

But is that how we learned baseball? Did we have to know all the rules, the long history of the game, before we would play? Or did you just love to play with your friends, for the sheer fun of it? Didn't we learn about the game as we played it? No one plays if they

don't want to. No one plays by reading a book either. They are invited and play from the heart and as best they can.

So also with Christianity. I have studied Scripture and much theology. But I do not always know what every teaching means. And meanings change as I grow in life. But on first base, on Good Friday many of us stand around stuck on understanding whether God exists or something before we'll run to the next base. Yes, on Good Friday the bases are loaded.

On second base are those who say that Christianity is only a feeling. After all, we came to baseball because we *loved* to play the game with our friends. Without that joy the game would be dead.

But imagine if baseball were just good feelings. Chaos would erupt. When does a person strike out? When he or she feels like it? No, every game has some ground rules like three strikes out. And every game evolves as it's played -- as in the designated hitter rule.

Christianity is full of many feelings: of sadness and joy, despair and hope, fear and love, solitude and empowerment. Live it from the heart, please. But feelings are not enough. The church can articulate ground rules and adaptive day-to-day policies for effective witness -- effective in that other people feel invited to play this great game of life with us. Yes, some ground rules and a lot of feeling.

Like the evolution of baseball, Christianity has evolved as new situations have come up. Today, we live in a world where no nation and no religion can think in isolation. We live in a world where solid scientific knowledge has changed how we see the world and

ourselves -- in our time, especially, in regard to human sexuality. New situations will always arise for the church, including this one.

But there, on second base, on Good Friday, we only want the good feelings -- the good old days. We want to avoid the confusing feelings and hard questions of new circumstances. We stand on second base unwilling to run into an unknown future. Yes, on Good Friday, the bases are loaded.

On third base are those of us who have been really hurt by life: who have lost loved ones, who have struggled with devastating diseases, who are no strangers to war, family breakdowns, addictions, prejudices and the other sufferings in life. And we want to know why God allows this to happen to us before we will run to home plate. We want God to keep the adversities of life away from us. And because, in our estimation, God doesn't, we won't run on.

In baseball it makes no sense to argue over why there are four bases, a ball and a bat. Three or five bases and it's not baseball any more. So just play the game! And when you do play, you cannot worry about getting clobbered by the ball, or grazing your leg as you slide into home plate, or bumping into another player. Those are risks of the game and we absorb those risks by the sheer joy of playing the game.

So also with life. We cannot change the ground rules. We are born without any choice. We are creatures with needs and wants. One day we will die. Those are ground rules of the game of life. And as we play the game of life, there are risks of getting

clobbered, of our hearts and minds being grazed with disappointments, of bumping into wars, disease and people of ill will.

But we play the game of life because we find that life has a way of taking care of the troubles. It's when we stand on the sidelines with doubt, anger and cynicism that life is so absurd. It will stay that way too --until you jump in and play the game. The joy of playing the game has a way of taking care of all our fears.

And even if you lose, as Giants fans can attest to all too well, the joyless feeling, the growing understanding of how you lost and even suffering the hurts and bruises, still mean that you win! Only more deeply -- because you played and learned. Life is such a game.

But we all live stuck on Good Friday. Our bases are loaded —loaded with rationalists on first base who think that understanding must come first (when it really comes while you are actually playing the game); loaded with sentimentalists on second base who only want the good feelings (while feelings are at the heart of the game, ground rules are needed for the game to work and to resolve new situations); loaded on third base with the angry and wounded who won't play anymore until God changes the rules (who really just need to be loved, to be listened to, to be truly welcomed). Our bases are loaded on Good Friday. But who will come to bat for us?

The devil, the destroyer of life, is pitching fast curve balls. The field is populated with skillful deceivers. The people of God are locked at the loaded bases. Even Barry Bonds can't help us here. No, it is Jesus, who comes to bat for us. And when the devil pitches Jesus

is hit very hard, a deadly first strike to the hands. And then a deadly second strike to the feet and into his side. Bases still loaded. Is the game of life lost?

On the third pitch, Christ, by the power of God, slams the ball. It's out of the park! A home run! And as Christ runs to first, then second, then third base, Christ sweeps us all joyfully into running this grand slam of the game of life. Get into the game and run with joy! Join in as Christ runs by you. Learn as you go! Enjoy your religion. Let loose your hurts and run with Christ to home plate. For Christ has set us all free to win the game that is life.

This is what Easter means. "Alleluia! Christ is Risen! Christ is risen indeed!" Risen for the nurture and healing of the world.

Amen

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