

Commentary on the Gospel for Sun, Jun 26th 2016

In the US, baseball is a summer tradition. This weekend the streets of Omaha are bubbling with the activities of the NCAA College World Series which our city has hosted for many years. Fans come from all over the country to support their teams. It is so much fun to watch young fans watch with admiration the accomplished college athletes on the field while seasoned baseball fans track the box scores. The excitement around this baseball tournament got me thinking about how often we, in the US, use metaphors inspired from baseball: “throwing a curveball” “covering all the bases” “fielding questions” “going to bat for something” “being a heavy hitter” “in a league of their own” “out of left field” “step up to the plate.” The list goes on and on. Metaphors can be tricky if you do not happen to understand the context. Yet metaphors can also create a way to create understanding of a challenging topic. Jesus has a beautiful gift with metaphor.

In today’s Gospel from Luke, Jesus encounters someone who enthusiastically states: “I will follow you wherever you go.” Jesus responds: “Foxes have dens and birds of the sky have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to rest his head.” Jesus uses metaphor to explain that to truly follow him one must be ready to leave the comforts of home. This challenges me to pray about times I cling to the comforts of home or friends rather than push myself in following Jesus. Jesus is not asking me to literally abandon my home but rather to live my faith. The times I extend out of my comfort zone are the times I can most fully experience and share God’s love.

Along his journey Jesus invites another person to follow him. However, the individual asks if he can first stay and bury the dead. Jesus responds: “Let the dead bury their dead.” In Jesus’ challenge to the invited follower I hear there is always something I could be doing which can get in the way of my following Jesus. Life’s day to day responsibilities can pile up, providing a profound distraction. Jesus invites me to pray about what is getting in the way of my being a follower. What distracts me from living my faith? How can I support others who get bogged down in their desires to “bury the dead?”

And a third person offered to follow Jesus but first wanted to go to say goodbye to his family. Jesus replies: “No one who sets a hand to the plow and looks to what was left behind is fit for the kingdom of God.” This metaphor is from farming before GPS directed farm equipment. Looking behind when plowing rather than forward at a point in the distance resulted in crooked rows of crops. My work as a mediator of conflicts is well served by this metaphor. Most of the conflict resolution systems in our society focus on the past by narrowly attempting to prove who was right and who wrong. While it is important to address the real issues, focusing only on the past ends up with the metaphorical crooked rows. When working to resolve the hurts and fears and anger of conflict we need to acknowledge each other’s perspectives and then look to the future where we can create a new solution. In today’s second reading in his letter to the Galatians, Paul offers a fundamental rule: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Paul warns against biting and devouring one another. I am committed to helping other people manage their conflicts. And I need to devote the same attention to managing the conflicts I find

myself in. Being reminded to love my neighbor as myself is a powerful first step. I can look forward and pray for guidance on how the conflict can be transformed.

Today I pray to hear God's call to be a true follower of Christ. Talk about the chance to "hit it out of the ballpark!"

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