

October 18, 2015

"Letting Go"

Mark 10:35-45

I love the game of golf And I understand it a little. Don't play it well but I understand it. Little white ball, 18 holes. Object is to get that little white ball into the cup 18 times taking as few strokes possible.



Mark Twain said golf was a good walk spoiled. I get that. It has also been called a 5 mile walk punctuated with acute disappointment and only occasional exhilaration. I get that too - lots of fumbling and bumbling along in my game with a few shots that I would love to tell you about.

What I don't get right now is baseball or to be more precise the baseball being played by the Toronto blue jays. I mean are they just playing with our emotions? Wow after the incredible excitement of a week ago with the jays down two games to none in the ALDS then coming back to win three in a row including a wild 7th inning here at home and now down two again this time to the Kansas City Royals

Who will ever forget that 7th inning - a harmless throw back to the Aaron Sanchez that glances off the hand or bat of Shin Soo Choo and trickles towards third base allowing Odor to score - oh the agony of defeat, the possibility of losing that way. If we had there would have been a riot I think. And Canada would have invaded the United States the next day.

But then three consecutive errors by the rangers in the bottom of the seventh loaded the bases, followed by a single to centre where the tying run was scored and Ben Revere the runner on first base was out at second. Unbelievable. A lot of bumbling and fumbling around - eventually setting up the three run home run for Bautista. It was excitement and drama of the highest order. Wow! Earlier Encarnacion had tied the game with a homer of his own, standing for a moment to admire it then trotting around the bases with his right elbow in the air - the Edwing they call it. Then Bautista admiring his home run and flipping the bat in the air in a moment of uncontrolled ecstasy as the crowd went wild.

"What next", exuberant jay fans including myself were saying. Easy wins over Kansas City for sure. But a boring and quiet game by the jays in the opener - Jay's handed a 5-0 loss. Ouch. We will get the next one for sure.

In the second game we were cruising along with David Price in full control until the 7th inning again. Jays ended up doing some fumbling and fumbling as well. There was a pop up to shallow right field playable by either Bautista or Ryan Goins until for some inexplicable reason they both pull back and let the ball fall between them. And it caused an eerie feeling among Jay fans. Sure enough it opened the doors with and the Royals scored five times off of David Price who looked shell shocked.

And he wasn't the only one -- Blue Jay fans coast to coast were too. Including me. Barb and I were watching the game. Manager John Gibbons was doing some fumbling and bumbling or so I thought - get Price out of there I wanted to scream - actually I think I did and Barb said to me -it's no fun if you get angry about it. I don't understand baseball - too bizarre - fumbling and bumbling and occasional moments of exhilaration. Maybe it's more like golf than I thought.

There's lots of fumbling and bumbling around by the disciples yet again in this passage in Mark's gospel.

This is the third time in the gospel that Jesus is trying to talk about his destiny - his eventual suffering and death. The first time Peter actually swore at him – they were not words Peter wanted to hear and he was convinced Jesus was out of his mind.

The second time the disciples seemed to ignore Jesus completely and instead had an argument amongst themselves in terms of who was going to be the greatest? And this time the sons of Zebedee (James and John) ask him if they can have positions of power in his coming glory. When the rest of the disciples heard about this they were some upset.

It seems like the disciples didn't have a clue about what was Jesus was saying. Seems like a 7th inning for them - lots of fumbling and bumbling around. Three strikes you are out, Jesus could have said if he was playing by the rules. Or at least he could have screamed at them. Can't you see

what I am all about, he could have said. Don't you get it? How can you be so blind. Or maybe they weren't so blind. Maybe they did see.

Maybe they didn't know everything that was in store for Jesus and for themselves but *maybe* they knew enough to be scared. Earlier in verse 32 it states some who followed them on the road to Jerusalem were indeed afraid. Maybe they were just looking for a little bit of security, a little hope. Maybe they knew the going ahead was going to be rough and they just wanted to know that in the end things were going to be ok. That's reasonable isn't it?

If that is the way it was Jesus words about his death and potentially theirs (the baptism with which he was baptized and the cup he would drink) would have shaken them to their very core and they would have needed even more assurance that everything was going to be okay. We would want assurances wouldn't we - if we were the disciples?

And assurance is exactly what Jesus gives him, but not on the terms they expect. They are still looking for assurance in terms of the same old categories and assumptions they've always - looking for the security that power and privilege affords. Position in society was the only thing that gave security and so that's what they are looking for. Jesus they say, in your coming kingdom can we be the ones to sit on your right and on your left?

When we are afraid we too look for reassurances. And the reassurance Jesus gives is this: "Whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the son of man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many".

Jesus is casting a beautiful vision here - a vision for the disciples to follow - a vision that leads to greatness in God's eyes - a purpose that is profound.

Go back for a moment to that comment Barb made to me when I was watching the game last night - it's no fun when you get angry about it. She is right. The purpose of baseball is entertainment. The purpose of sport is entertainment.

Here Jesus casts a vision for the purpose of his disciples - all of us from the days of James and John and Peter and Andrew to today. It's a purpose for the church - a vision for the church – to be servants one to the other and to the community around. It's a purpose we forget when the church is struggling.

Something we forget when we are afraid for the church - our church. When we are afraid we follow the old categories and assumptions - we seek to protect who we are and what we have. We become inward thinking – possessive; we hoard our resources; we stockpile for a rainy day; we want to protect what we have here. We can become paranoid and on guard to make sure no one takes advantage of us. Just like the disciples we fumble and bumble around.

And Jesus' words of assurance don't feel very assuring. But they are - they so much are.

Serve one another

Serve our community

Serve as a follower of Christ

Serve as one who is baptised - one who is claimed by God as a beloved child and called upon to follow Christ by entering into the way of the cross

Serve as one who shares in the cup at the table, the cup that symbolizes a crucified Christ

In service we will find great promise - the fear will dissipate and we will live as faithful disciples - even as we are stumbling and fumbling around.

Thanks be to God.