

Sister Who's Perspective

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Life is a collaborative effort, encompassing more than we know. In a time of abundant "information overload," news, communication, and travel across great distances, we often talk at each other without listening, communicating, or understanding. Humanity needs its icons, but also its iconoclasts to grow beyond the good and bad qualities that now limit and describe us. The essences of both Godde and us remain, in the midst of questions, to be discovered, experienced, and expressed. Please share in this ongoing dialogue, remembering to indicate whether and how you wish to be identified. Blessings, love, and peace to you. ---Sister Who

Overview

The sport of baseball is perhaps one of the most over-used metaphors within the current era, but the wonder of it may be that even after so much use, this metaphor still has more to offer. This month's essays are my attempt to bring a new perspective to this dynamic, to discover what else it may yet produce.

Within every moment, the outcome is a combination of the physical qualities of the tools, the surrounding environmental conditions, and the actions and contributions of multiple players. This would make the outcome, as expressed by the author and psychologist Scott Peck, "over-determined" (too many causes and influences to be able to say which one is most at fault). Realizing this will hopefully discourage us from wasting any time trying to decide who to blame. Most important of all is to just do our best.

May one and all and everything, blessed and loved ever be.

Curve-balls Again

Perhaps the first and most obvious quality of any pitch is that it comes from somewhere else, from someone else; it does not come from one's self and there is no need to blame one's self for the pitch being what it is. The general intention of almost every batter, however, is not so much to evaluate the pitch as to hit the ball. The distinction of the curve-ball pitch, is that, by the time it comes within reach, it is not where one would otherwise expect it to be. During its brief flight, influenced by a variety of forces, the ball's trajectory has changed. If the batter does not somehow recognize this change, the bat is unlikely to connect with the ball.

If the goal is simply to hit the ball, why spend any time at all on evaluating pitches? If the goal is that everyone will be a good person, why study criminal psychology and behavior? The most basic answer would be, to develop one's abilities and empower one's self to calmly and effectively respond to adverse circumstances. As rare as it may be, relatively speaking, for a building to

somehow catch fire (what a curious expression, but that's a discussion for another time), the possible outcomes of such a situation are so terrible that virtually every public building has an evacuation plan, which in many cases is posted in particular places within the building. If a fire should occur, those within would follow the wisdom of the plan rather than being paralyzed by fear or reacting in self-sabotaging ways.

Similarly, it is highly recommendable to learn how to respond to curve-balls so that one does not strike-out within whatever interactive scenario one encounters. Even if we could promise that there would never be another curve-ball, the result of that is simply that no one would really know how to deal with a curve-ball.

Returning to the signature quality of a curve-ball pitch, that it does not ultimately come within reach where one would otherwise expect, there are obviously a great many situations and circumstances within life in which we have done everything that can be done to assure a positive outcome and are astonished to be confronted with something else instead. We anticipate, encourage, nurture, and expect connection, yet find ourselves threatened with isolation, exclusion, or dis-empowerment. What will actually happen next, significantly depends upon how we respond.

As expressed by the author, Roger Crawford, within his book, "How High Can You Bounce," the moment of impact between a rubber ball and a concrete sidewalk defines whether the result will be torn pieces of rubber or a higher bounce than has ever before been achieved. Similarly, when the curve-ball has been pitched and there is no way of avoiding it or sending it back for a replacement, the virtually infinite creativity within us is invited to transform a moment of challenge into one of triumph. If we have not prepared, practiced, nurtured, and encouraged this connection with the immaterial creative part of ourselves, however, its greatest blessings may rest just beyond our fingertips.

May one and all and everything, blessed and loved ever be.

Foul-balls Again

I think it's fairly safe to say that within every inter-relational connection, there is at least one intention for a positive outcome. Considering how common disappointment is within human life experience, however, a perfect connection between the ball and the bat is sufficiently rare that it is celebrated whenever it does in fact occur. The rest of the time, among the alternative possibilities, is that of hitting a foul ball. Digressing for a moment into a discussion of language, it is clearly not the ball that is foul but rather the outcome of the connection between bat and ball that is foul, yet somehow the ball gets grammatically blamed for the outcome while the bat is excused.

I was often told in childhood that "it takes two to tangle." Within every argument, the cause of the argument is never the fault of only one participant, but rather is shared by all persons concerned. Consequently, I developed the habit rather early in life of asking myself after any such incident, "what did I contribute to that situation?" The same question can be asked of any moment within which the connection between bat and ball produces a foul trajectory.

The perhaps amusing distinction to note, however, is that a foul ball is considered less disappointing than a strike—because the bat did, after all, actually make a connection with the ball. Neither a strike nor a foul ball is counted as positive, but the latter is somehow not considered to be as bad as the former. The empowering metaphor is that there are possibilities between the two extremes of striking out or hitting a home-run; metaphorically, life is not all black and white, but also includes shades of gray. Is it good or bad? That depends upon what comes next.

The other curious quality of foul balls is that this single term represents two radically contrasting possibilities. Being either too far to the right or too far to the left are both equally considered to be foul. What I drew from this while still a small child, is that extremes in any direction are always to be carefully examined and critiqued rather than blindly trusted. Are they inside or outside of whatever lines define the playing field?

That raises the next consideration of so-called foul balls. What if the lines of the playing field were erroneously placed? What if something outside of the ball or its trajectory is the real reason for being labeled foul? What if the standards, boundaries, and norms which have been societally set, are in fact in the wrong place?

Obviously any student of human history would agree that such lines have often been erroneously placed. For all of their philosophical accomplishments, the ancient Greeks considered women to be property and not within the lines defining qualified candidates for positions of civic leadership. During certain periods of history within various geographical locations, people of specific ethnic, national, religious, or physical ability were considered to be "outside of the lines" and denied opportunities of all sorts. Clearly it is (at the very least) very problematic when identity rather than behavior prompts being labeled "foul."

The concern is not, however, whether one has been labeled "foul," but rather, what is the response to being either so labeled or to acknowledging that one has inadvertently acted in a legitimately foul manner toward another. Within the game of baseball, in most cases, the response is to immediately give the batter another chance to succeed. In life, unfortunately, people are often less forgiving. In both cases, however, what must follow is a demonstration of making a genuinely good connection. Phrased another way, I often insist that we must do what we can to provide opportunities for others to "do the right thing." If we fail to provide the opportunities, we must accept part of the responsibility if others fail to demonstrate the best of which they are capable.

In order to continue the game, however, it is imperative that the batter truly believes that a certain number of foul balls are genuinely forgivable. Within the movie, "Seabiscuit," my absolute favorite quote is the advice of the old horse-trainer that "You don't throw a whole life away, just because it's banged up a bit." As demonstrated within the movie, "Angels in the Outfield," as long as there's one pitch left, it may still be possible to win the game.

The final curious quality of foul balls is the possibility that they will cross the veil, so to speak, between the players and the audience, who can hear and see each other but who will otherwise generally not directly interact. A foul ball that veers into the audience along the right or left baselines may unexpectedly raise an individual from the category of spectators to being an actual participant. Within that unanticipated moment, what one experiences as a foul, may empower the other to feel like a winner. The magic of foul balls is thus that they too, like so many other things in life, have multi-dimensional possibilities.

May one and all and everything, blessed and loved ever be.

Incoming Fast-balls

One of the fascinations of baseball, even for those who are not sports fans, could be its continually fluctuating combinations of stillness and movement; of slowness and speed.

If the game of baseball were viewed as a race, my question would be, "Which one?" As the ball races from the pitcher's hand toward the batter, mental and emotional reactions race to connect before the moment of opportunity has passed. If the ball is hit and races toward a particular area of the outfield, a player races at an obviously slower speed, hoping to get there either before or at least at the same time that the ball does. Once the ball is retrieved, the player's mental and emotional reactions race to acknowledge, interpret, and respond to the movements of others within the infield. Once the ball is thrown toward a particular base, a runner from the opposing team strives to arrive at that particular base first. Paralleling all of these races are the announcer's calls to the spectators and those attending the game by television or radio, informing them about what is occurring, hopefully almost as quickly as it is happening. Coaches are also racing to interpret and to convey signals to their players, perhaps instructing one of them to either stay on third base or run for home, depending upon whether or not the ball is likely to arrive there first.

Perhaps it is a little too obvious that life is a similar combination of many different simultaneous or sequential races. There must be alternations between exertion and rest, however, because the human body is simply not designed or equipped to run on adrenaline all of the time. Within music, the pauses between notes are as important as the notes themselves. Within baseball, the quiet moments of focus between those of racing to react or to arrive at new locations, can be as important as the actions themselves; stillness may, in fact, define effective action.

*"Mysticism is
the experience of awe
that changes us forever;
religion is the reminder
of what we already believe."*

--Sister Who

The fast-ball pitch, if I understand correctly, attempts to move even faster than one can effectively react. If this pitch is consistently successful, the game must be decided in other ways. A pitcher who can consistently throw fast-balls with which no batter can connect, may prevent the opposing team from scoring, but in attempting to win the game, the pitcher's own team may face a similar challenge. A score of zero for both teams means that the game would be considered a tie, having neither a winner nor a loser. In all likelihood, however, whether by skill or by sheer luck, one batter may connect with the fastest fast-ball pitch and thus score a home-run.

A central element of baseball or of virtually any other game, therefore, is unpredictability. To play any such game, one must be willing to face a certain vulnerability, unpredictability, spontaneity, insecurity, and the risk of losing. Those who genuinely cannot tolerate an experience of failure, may be the ones least likely to play at all.

No one likes to fail, yet there are times in life when the intensity and sequence of fast-ball pitches leaves us no other option but to strike out. Within such moments, the game must be decided or won in other ways. Within a monthly newsletter a number of years ago, I described this dynamic as the challenge of turning a fall (toward a pool) into a dive. Gravity is (in most cases) a scientific constant of our world. How we encounter the water below, however, is potentially something which we can decide. We may not be able to hit the fast-ball pitches coming at us in the way we wish, but there are always other options capable of transforming our relationship with the overall game.

A weakness, perhaps, of the fast-ball pitch is that it travels in great haste along a very singular path. A basic principle of virtually every martial art is that of "using the greater force of something against itself." If the bat is able to position itself directly in the path of the oncoming ball, therefore, much less force from the batter will be necessary. The ball's own momentum may cause it to ricochet further into the outfield than the batter would have otherwise ever been able to make the ball go.

Similarly, if we give ourselves to life, standing fully and wisely in its path, we may feel a tremendous force of impact far beyond that experienced by any of those who chose to remain in the dug-out. We may be just the presence, however, that can transform that oncoming energy into the greatest home-run of the game.

May one and all and everything, blessed and loved ever be.

The Home-Run Connection

It could be considered an act of faith to believe in the possibility of a home-run within that moment within which it is equally possible to strike out. It could be considered an act of faith to speak the truth when I am completely surrounded by lies. It could be considered an act of faith to simply be myself, doing the best that only Godde and I know I can do, within that moment of greatest pressure, intimidation, and discouragement. I suggest that the spark of light that makes all such miracles possible, is the act of being fully present to meet the challenge.

It would be easy to be mentally and emotionally somewhere else instead of fully present, considering the over-abundance of distractions, peripheral concerns, and negative speculations. Thus it is an act of faith capable of changing the course of one's life, to remember that the best things can still happen, to remember that (as phrased by a church bulletin cover I saw over thirty years ago) "there is not enough darkness in the entire universe to extinguish the light of a single candle."

If we do not step up to the plate and serve that positive possibility, however, history will be decided by someone else. If we do not swing the bat with every particle of strength and commitment we have to offer, any home-run that occurs may belong to someone else. If we fail to understand the significance of being given a turn at bat, we may not realize that we are not only being shown that we are loved, but also that someone has sufficient faith in us to give us a chance. Consequently, when standing at home plate, waiting for a pitch, we never stand there alone.

Neither the pitcher nor the manager nor any politician nor any corporate administrator has the power to do that which only we ourselves can do. Similarly, no friend, loved one, or hired assistant has the power to do that which only we ourselves can do. No one other than myself will ever have my voice to say the things that only I can say in the way that only I can say them.

In connecting with the ball and hitting the home-run, however, it is not purely the self that the player serves, but rather the team as a whole. Similarly, when an individual embraces truth relationally and holistically rather than narcissistically, all of humanity moves forward toward ever greater wisdom and love.

May one and all and everything, blessed and loved ever be!

On a Personal Note

Hm. Updates. To say it's been a busy month would be an enormous understatement.

Twenty-three new episodes of the ongoing public access television series "Sister Who Presents" were recorded. Editing will hopefully be completed within two to three weeks, at which point they will be viewable on the Internet through a link near the lower left of www.SisterWho.com.

I have begun creating a "Sister Who a/k/a Rev. Denver NeVaar, MTS" Facebook.com page, but am having some trouble configuring its display so this is an ongoing project.

Bedivere has quadrupled in size since he first arrived within our family and to my amazement he and Gareth are beginning to enjoy each other as playmates in the backyard, rolling over and over, chasing each other in circles (Gareth is still faster), and apparently reawakening a sort of joyful and carefree attitude in Gareth that I have not seen in a long time. Nonetheless, Gareth still occasionally demonstrates a certain lack of emotional stability (in spite of all of the emotional support I've been able to give him), so, for safety, his nose-basket must continue to be used.

The next open house / potluck gathering for God Space Sanctuary is scheduled to occur next Sunday, from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. and I continue to hope that more people will discover and begin to utilize the sacred spaces here as supplemental spiritual resources to whatever spiritual path they find effective within their lives.

I have also made contact with someone living west of the Denver-metro area who wants a building removed, which has resulted in a significant quantity of building materials for a number of future projects here (I just wish there were more than just myself to do them).

Finally, I am nearing completion of the fourth (entitled "The Essential Contribution of Spiritual Vocation") of six pre-dissertation papers within my doctoral program.

May Godde's blessings, love, and peace be with you now and always, *Sister Who*

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