

## **Join the Team (A Sermon for All Saint's Day)**

November 5, 2017

St. Mary's Episcopal Church (Cypress, Texas)

Revelation 7.9-17

Matthew 5.1-12

I've been waiting for the perfect week to preach this sermon, and I guess this is it.

For 18 years of my life, I probably played more than 500 baseball games. And I've probably watched another couple thousand games in person or on TV. Growing up, my family vacations were planned around when and where I was playing in tournaments.

There are two seats at the Ballpark in Arlington with my family's name on them. At my wedding, my mom and I danced to "Take Me Out to the Ballgame."

In case you didn't know, much of my life has revolved around baseball. And I've done plenty of thinking about baseball as a metaphor for life and faith.

After all, baseball is defined by moments of wonder and amazement in contrast to the ordinary; it's got a hall of saints; and it even has its own rituals like the 7th inning stretch.

That sounds like church to me.

Much of baseball's attraction flows from its ability to stitch people together, to create communities, to foster bonds of lasting power based on shared memories and experiences. It has a power to bring people together: parent and child, neighbor and friend, community and city.

We've seen that these past couple of weeks, haven't we? The Astros gave this town, and the whole country frankly, something to rally around in the midst of disaster. Really, really good baseball, played by people you could admire, has provided hope in a time of intense grief.

In a sense, this playoff run demonstrated the continuing power of baseball to bring people together for something more than merely baseball.

Baseball has the power to unite us across differences that are so often used to divide.

That sounds an awful lot like the Christian faith to me, doesn't it?

Baseball has its stars. Jose Altuve, Justin Verlander, and the other household names.

Those are a bit like the saints, the capital "S" saints. This book is full of them. Peter, Paul, Mary, and all those that we all know. Those saints that everyone remembers.

But baseball, and the Christian faith, is a team game.

The Astros have Evan Gattis, Lance McCullers, and those role players only Houston fans know.

That's these folks over here, those lowercase "s" saints that only we know. Those saints that only we remember, with names like Harry, Mary Jane, Dona, and Dale.

The world may never know their impact, but we do. The world may never know their name, but we do.

In our reading from Revelation, I'm struck by the question that is asked. There's a whole crowd of people standing in the throneroom of God. But one of the elders asks "Who are these, robed in white, and where have they come from?"

We don't know their names, but someone did. Someone does.

Because the folks on this wall, the folks in our hearts, lived their life with such devotion to God and to their neighbors that we remember them.

And we are called to live our life in the same way.

Today we continue to kick off our year of stewardship, which is about so much more than money. It is about sharing with one another those gifts we have been given. In a sense, it's us being a part of the team.

We saw that after Harvey, too, didn't we? If people had a room to spare, they offered it. If people had time to spare, they went and mucked out houses. And people generously gave millions and millions of dollars. People did their part for the team...for the community.

And I think our community - both our geographic community and our church community - would be better off if we continued to live that way, don't you think?

The verse we're using as the foundation for this year of living generously is 1 Peter 4:10. "Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received."

Serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received.

We've all received a gift of some kind from this place. We all have stories to share.

And starting this week, we're going to hear some of them. Rev. Beth and I have invited some folks to share with us what St. Mary's has meant to them. Our hope is that these witnesses show us the power of this community, and how we are all called to serve one another with whatever gift we have received.

So I want to invite Shirley Clay up here.