

Face Judgment with Joy

Memorial Day weekend is known for a lot of things...

- Parades and speeches about the brave efforts and the personal sacrifice of some for the purpose of keeping all people free
- And we know that there are a lot of lawn, garden, and outdoor projects that get done
- And with the long weekend there are a lot of barbecues and family cookouts
- And.... baseball

There are lots of great baseball stories that are good life lessons. Here is one:

It's 1908. The New York Giants and Chicago Cubs met with the pennant on the line. There was a last minute change in the New York Giants lineup. The starting first baseman had sprained his ankle and a young and what appeared to be rising star was put into his place that day. Young Fred Merckle would get a chance to play that day.

The game was tied and with two outs in the bottom of the ninth inning, the Giants were at bat. The winning run was on third base and Fred Merckle was at first base. The batter hit a clean single and the runner came cleanly in from third base with the winning run. As soon as the hit took place, the jubilant Giant fans, on seeing that they had won the pennant, came pouring out onto the field, so quickly in fact that the play was still going on as they came rushing out. Being a young 19-year-old and seeing the crowd bearing down on the field, Merckle took off toward the clubhouse ready to jump up and down with his teammates.

The problem was that he didn't go all the way to second base, and if you know baseball, there is a force out on the play. Well, the veteran second baseman for the Chicago Cubs sure noticed that Merckle hadn't gone to second, and if he could get a hold of that ball and touch second base then the run wouldn't count because of the force out on the play. First he had to find the ball. The ball had gotten tossed up into the air, and a New York fan had a trophy and was going off with it. Well, two Chicago Cubs fans saw what was happening and chased him down, knocked him over, took the ball away from him, and tossed it out to the Chicago second baseman.

All the while, Fred Merckle was jumping up and down, enjoying the victory and thinking that he was safe, and absorbed with that content feeling that all was well.

When the Chicago second baseman got the ball and jumped up and down on second base for the watchful and waiting umpire, the call was made. OUT! As a result, the game was not over right then, and New York went on to lose the game and the pennant that year. Fred Merckle went on to play for fourteen more years in the major leagues, but he never lived down the reputation of being the man responsible for the Giants not winning the pennant, and he was always known for Merckle's mistake.

Picture Fred Merckle. Picture how content and happy he was for a few great moments, not thinking about being called OUT! Not thinking about a "judgment call" that was awaiting him.

The Bible clearly tells us that very same attitude is what happens to so, so many people that walk around everyday. So often that is the type of thinking we all can fill into. Walking around, thinking that the future is all well and secure, when really it is not. There is a judgment call that is still pending.

That is how it is with sin and us humans. We can walk around our days not thinking about the results of, the consequences of, the judgment of sin. But, even if we choose not to think about it, the reality is still there.

Now, whenever you think about sin, how does that make you feel personally? Do you sort of think about sin and you think about yourself and think about others and kind of put yourself on a little scale in your mind? *"Well, I know I'm not perfect. Sure, there are probably some people that sin a little less than me (saints), but I can certainly look around and there are a lot more sinful people than myself."* It can't be that bad after all, because there are some pretty bad sinners out there. Is that the kind of thought process that can go on? *"Sure I need a Savior, but there are a lot of people that need a Savior a lot more than me!"* On that scale you'd fall somewhere in the middle right.

Then we look at Scripture and we see what has been shared with us. **For there is no difference. All have fallen short of the glory of God.**

That phrase right there in Scripture throws off the whole thinking process that we might go through with regard to sin. We make distinctions in our minds so often. Bad sin...not so bad sin... "I'm a little closer than him...maybe she is a little closer than me...and whoa... that personal needs a lot of forgiveness!"

Scripture clearly tells us that there is no difference. All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. ALL. No distinction, no difference. Whether a newborn baby, or a missionary helping the poor, or gang members involved in drive-by shootings. ALL have fallen short.

In God's perfect presence, either you're perfect and totally sinless, or you're not. No distinctions. No grading scale...no cleansing station halfway to get rid of the few little sins that you might have. Either you're perfect and you're in, or you're not and you're out. "There is no difference, for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God".

But there is something that does make a difference! And that is the wonderful, beautiful, and comforting message that is shared with us by St. Paul. Where does our hope lie? Is there anything that can give us some hope from this falling short of God's glory and not being perfect? YES!

"But now, a righteousness from God, apart from the law has been made known to us." Apart from self-improvement plans and self-help books, apart from televangelists who tell you what you should and shouldn't do... apart from all that we even *can* do... a WAY to righteousness (*or being in right with God*) has been freely given to us and made known to us.

We are justified freely and seen as perfect and clean in God's sight through a relationship of faith in Jesus as Savior.

There is one line that we share with the Discovery Hour kids and that we have the confirmands memorize as they come to explore their personal relationship with God. **"We are saved by God's grace...through faith in Jesus Christ."** Faith that is freely given to us in baptism! Faith that is strengthened in the hearing of God's Word. Faith that is renewed as we come to Communion and put out our hands and recognize our need for forgiveness. Faith in Jesus Christ is what makes the difference!

That is the foundation that we can build our lives and our future on. Just like Jesus told the story of a wise man who built his house on a foundation of rock and not on some shifting sand. Build your future and your hopes and dreams on that relationship of faith in Jesus. You can place your trust in Him.

Fred Merckle danced around in joy for a few minutes, oblivious to the reality of the situation in the baseball game, before he realized the judgment call of the umpire. Well, you can be joyful and peace-filled even though knowing of falling short of perfect, because you live with the peace of knowing of your Savior Jesus.

I encourage you to respond to that free gift with having good fruit produced in your life. In coming to know and realize more and more just how wonderful your free gift of forgiveness really is, respond with living with mercy and forgiveness for those around you. Life is short... live with peace and forgiveness!

So on this weekend where we take time to reflect on the brave sacrifice that so many have given in the protection of freedom of this country, reflect also on the sacrifice that won you the freedom of eternity in heaven. And know that when you face your judgment, you do so with a Savior, and with the free gift of forgiveness won on the cross for you!