**The Hall of Fame or the Hall of Shame**

For those who know me, many of my analogies and expressions come from years of playing and following baseball. I like the fact that there are no clocks in baseball. I like the fact that when we count scoring, it involves an individual rather than a ball. I like the fact that scoring includes being “Safe at Home.” But I have also spent enough time having home runs hit off me when I was pitching, striking out when batting, and overthrowing a ball to first base when it should have been an easy out. I remember once having a manager, tell me that most pitcher’s problem is inside his head, not in his arm. If we think that our curve ball is not breaking, or in my case, the fork ball is not dropping under the wheelhouse of a batter — well it probably won’t, even if we have no arm or shoulder problems.

 Every now and then I have replayed in my mind a few of the games I won and also the ones I lost, and along the way I have realized, in the end, that baseball is much more forgiving than life. For example, if a batter fails 7 times out of 10, he has a 300+ batting average and could be a candidate for the Hall of Fame. If a pitcher strikes out eight batters in a game, but walked seven batters, he probably did not win that game. If a regular starting pitcher wins twenty games in the season and does so for a few years, he could be a candidate for the Hall of Fame, but consider how many games a starting pitcher begins each season, how many he loses, and how many he never finished. Baseball can be very forgiving, but sadly, life is often not that way.

 The judgment we pass on people is often unfair because it is often done without the person being present. Let’s ponder that. If a wife is a good wife 60% of time, is she a good wife? If a husband comes home from evening visits to places of liquid refreshment 5 nights per week, is he a good husband? If a child likes baseball and is a “.330 Hitter child” that is, is good three of ten times — is he or she a good child? If we have helped people 8 out of 10 times, but were not so helpful two times, what will people remember? How will we be judged? If a priest preaches 5 good sermons and five bad sermons — which in baseball means being a “.500 hitter” is he a good preacher? If a priest spends hours unseen praying for the people committed to his charge, but displeases someone — maybe even unintentionally, is he a good pastor? In the end, we daily select people for the Hall of Fame and the Hall of Shame, but it is based on our own expectations.

 When the Hall of Fame Committee sits down to look at the candidates for inclusion in Cooperstown, they usually look objectively at the records, until someone points out that the player was once unkind to the member, or the player failed to give an autograph or the player has adopted some bad behaviors. In the end, life can be like Pete Rose who has never been voted into the Hall of Fame because he “bet on baseball” and yet his record still stands.

 Every day we must look in the mirror and ask ourselves if we have been voted into the Hall of Fame or the Hall of Shame, but the good news is that there is no committee involved in the matter of Salvation. Even though the managers and coaches and fans have no idea why a player began to decline…sometimes they never bothered to find out what was happening in the ball player’s personal life. I know a former Major Leaguer who retired from baseball to try and repair his broken marriage. The list goes on, but in the end, we must be right with God. When we judge other people, we need to see how often we have failed to “get a hit” or “win a game.” Is it reasonable to expect that people will always be our image of perfection? Many Managers in Baseball did not have spectacular baseball careers as players, but they shared what they learned along the way, and sometimes those who have had “losses” have more compassion for players who are struggling.

 Take a moment today and look at your Roster. How many people have you kicked off the team? How many people have you kept in the dugout? How many people have you traded to other teams just to get rid of them? How many people no longer want to sit in the stands next to us? And if all of the players in our life who have been a problem for us showed up in the stands at the same time to watch us play, would we play well or poorly? Baseball is not life — Jesus is — and the Good News is that He is the only one who can put us in His Hall of Fame, made up of forgiven sinners, even when we think that we can put people into the Hall of Shame with our “justifiable” judgment.

**With Jesus on the mound - we will always win**

**and we will always be Safe at Home.**