

Chosen Last

My article is inspired by a sermon preached by Pastor Tara Macy at Community UMC, Shasta Lake

Two appointed “coaches” surveyed prospective players for a contest of skill, strength, speed and stamina known as sand-lot baseball. Unfortunately, I had none of those qualities—at least not in the right order. I was super-fast around the bases, but to get to base I would have to hit the ball and according to my baseball stats, getting a hit was a near-impossibility. “I’ll take Tony....” Whew! That was close; I wasn’t chosen last....

I remember being chosen last once. Man, that stinks.... Sometimes, one of my friends would be the coach and I would get a mercy-pick ahead of someone else. That was OK with me; I just didn’t want to be last one chosen. The best-case scenario was to get picked by your buddy and somehow end up on the team with the best players, because when you win, everyone gets the win no matter how good or bad you played.

Jesus told a parable about the kingdom of heaven—about how people are invited into the kingdom from first to last (Matthew 20:1-16). I think he could have told a parable about choosing teams for baseball.... In the parable, a landowner goes to the place where the day-laborers were waiting for hire, and he hires a crew early in the morning. Several times during the day the landowner returns and hires more crews, finally hiring a group with only one hour left for working. At the end of the day, he pays them all the same wage.

To get the most out of this parable, we must know that the last workers chosen were the least capable of all the workers. That’s the way it was then, and that’s the way it works today. When you hire day laborers, you try to hire the best that are there. When the landowner came to the worker-pool at the end of the day, those remaining would have been the older, weaker, limping, and disabled—those hoping to get picked; hoping to hear their name called. At the close of day, they were chosen, and even though they couldn’t do the same amount of work as the skilled, the strong, the fast...they get the same pay. Sort of like baseball when you win, no matter how long or how good you played, everyone gets the win.

Never one to shy away from sports metaphors, I can see how this applies to church—any church.... Some people come to church thinking that they have little to offer—feeling low on stamina and high on needs. Over and again, I’ve heard people say, “I just don’t have anything to wear to church.” What does that say about their opinion of church and church goers? Ours is a church that understands that the more a person needs us, that much more we need that person. Our “coach” needs those people, and he values them just as much as the ones that have come onto the team in their prime. The good news is that in the end, everyone gets the same victory.

Invite a friend to church today. Invites someone who needs a “win.”

Be the church, --pastor tony