

Teamwork

Acts 2:1 (KJV) And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.

Teamwork's a beautiful thing. When people come together for the same purpose, they can accomplish almost anything. But what makes a team more effective than an individual?

One day, I was in an airport waiting for my plane to depart. Somewhere near me, there were two guys discussing their weekends. The one guy told the tale of his son's weekend ping pong tournament. He explained that this young man had a wicked spike he could put on the ball. He would start out with some basic back-and-forth play with the other players and then he would spike the ball so hard and fast that no one could ever return the volley. He used this technique throughout the tournament and soon advanced up the ranks.

As he advanced, he was matched with an older gentleman. The young man used his standard technique to pass the ball back and forth a few times, then he smacked it across the table. Each round of the tournament was best out of three, so the young man used his signature move to beat the older man handily in the first game.

What the young man didn't realize was that the older man was testing him. The older man was systematically trying moves to see how the young man reacted. During this, the older man discovered two things: the kid had a wicked forehand spine and no backhand at all.

You see, the kid was unable to hit anything to his left on the table. If the ball came to his right, he was fine, but if it came to his left side, he couldn't hit it at all. Once the older man found that out, he never again allowed the young man to have any balls on the right side of the table. Every shot the young man received was on his left side.

Shot after shot came his way and for shot after shot he was completely helpless. In a short time, the young man lost two games and he was out of the tournament.

To the older man, this young kid was his opponent; his enemy. As his opponent, the older man found his weakness and then exploited that to his own gain. The older man had a weakness: he was slower than the young man and couldn't match the young man's speed with the spiked balls. The entire game came down to who could manipulate his opponent's weaknesses.

All of us have a weakness; all of us have a "backhand" that gets us into trouble. But your weakness doesn't make you weak; your inability to guard against your weakness is what makes you weak. How do you guard against your weakness? By surrounding yourself with people who are strong where you are weak; we call it a team.

In a team, you gather lots of people with different skill sets and then you arrange them per each person's talents and short comings.

In baseball, for example, you get one person who is good at throwing and make them the pitcher. You get another person who is good at catching, but needs work at throwing and you make him the first baseman. Then you get a guy who is well rounded; he can both throw and catch, and you make him the shortstop.

Each person has strengths and weaknesses. When you are on a team, you don't use your teammate's weakness against him; you compensate for those weaknesses.

When you know that a teammate can't catch a ball on his left side, you stand to his left. If an outfielder sees that the shortstop missed the ball, he runs in for the save. Even though individual members may be weak, the team is strong. While a teammate knows your weaknesses, and compensates for them, an enemy uses them against you.

Pentecost Sunday

The opening verse in my message is the story of the Day of Pentecost. This event takes place fifty days after the day of Passover, which is also the day of Jesus' crucifixion. Remember that Jesus was crucified on Passover (he was the sacrificial lamb), he was in the tomb three days, and then he rose again and spent forty days with the disciples. On the 43rd day, he ascends into heaven on a cloud. After that,

a week passes. One week after Jesus ascends into heaven is fifty days after his crucifixion and fifty days after Passover.

On the 50th day after Passover, a feast is held called “The Feast of Leavened Bread.”

Leviticus 23:16 (KJV) Even unto the morrow after the seventh sabbath shall ye number fifty days; and ye shall offer a new meat offering unto the Lord.

Notice that the second feast was one of unleavened bread, but this is the fourth feast which contains leavened bread. Leavening represents sin. Jesus is the sinless unleavened bread that was striped, pierced, broken, buried, and found again during the Seder meal. We’re the imperfect leavened bread that is brought before the Lord in the fourth feast. Fifty days after the unleavened bread is used in the service of the Lord, the leavened bread is finally acceptable for God. This feast of Leavened Bread takes place fifty days after the first three feasts. The Greek word for fifty is “Pentecost.”

Acts 2:1 (KJV) And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.

I used to wonder how Jesus could be sure that he had fulfilled all the prophecies of the Messiah. It seems like a dance that had been prepared for thousands of years and Jesus had to make sure he got all the moves just right. “Step, step, water into wine. Step, step, walking on water. Step, curtsy, step, cross, die, resurrect.” But I realize now that Jesus didn’t have to try and match this 2,000-year-old dance routine; he was God and as God he could see across time in a way that we cannot. God could simply look across time and tell Moses, “Ok, I need you to write down a feast of leavened bread on the 50th day after the Passover.”

However, what made the day work was not the fact that it was 50 days after Passover. The reason the Lord could pour out the Holy Ghost is because they were all in one accord and in one place. In other words, they were all a team.

But like any team, they get their strength not from any individual, but from the collective body. Jesus had just spent 40 days getting these individuals to function as a team. As a team, they were aware of each other’s weaknesses, but they did

not use those weaknesses to undermine each other. They compensated for each other's weaknesses and each one used his or her strength.

Casey at the Bat

*The outlook wasn't brilliant for the Mudville Nine that day;
the score stood four to two, with but one inning more to play.
And then when Cooney died at first, and Barrows did the same,
a sickly silence fell upon the patrons of the game.*

*A straggling few got up to go in deep despair. The rest
clung to that hope which springs eternal in the human breast;
they thought, if only Casey could get but a whack at that –
they'd put up even money, now, with Casey at the bat.*

*But Flynn preceded Casey, as did also Jimmy Blake,
and the former was a lulu and the latter was a fake,
so upon that stricken multitude grim melancholy sat,
for there seemed but little chance of Casey's getting to the bat.*

*But Flynn let drive a single, to the wonderment of all,
and Blake, the much despised, tore the cover off the ball;
and when the dust had lifted, and the men saw what had occurred,
there was Jimmy safe at second and Flynn a-hugging third.*

*Then from five thousand throats and more there rose a lusty yell;
it rumbled through the valley, it rattled in the dell;
it knocked upon the mountain and recoiled upon the flat,
for Casey, mighty Casey, was advancing to the bat.*

*There was ease in Casey's manner as he stepped into his place;
there was pride in Casey's bearing and a smile on Casey's face.
And when, responding to the cheers, he lightly doffed his hat,
no stranger in the crowd could doubt 'twas Casey at the bat.*

*Ten thousand eyes were on him as he rubbed his hands with dirt;
five thousand tongues applauded when he wiped them on his shirt.*

*Then while the writhing pitcher ground the ball into his hip,
defiance gleamed in Casey's eye, a sneer curled Casey's lip.*

*And now the leather-covered sphere came hurtling through the air,
and Casey stood a-watching it in haughty grandeur there.
Close by the sturdy batsman the ball unheeded sped--
"That ain't my style," said Casey. "Strike one," the umpire said.*

*From the benches, black with people, there went up a muffled roar,
like the beating of the storm-waves on a stern and distant shore.
"Kill him! Kill the umpire!" shouted someone on the stand;
and it's likely they'd have killed him had not Casey raised his hand.*

*With a smile of Christian charity great Casey's visage shone;
he stilled the rising tumult; he bade the game go on;
he signaled to the pitcher, and once more the spheroid flew;
but Casey still ignored it, and the umpire said: "Strike two."*

*"Fraud!" cried the maddened thousands, and echo answered fraud;
but one scornful look from Casey and the audience was awed.
They saw his face grow stern and cold, they saw his muscles strain,
and they knew that Casey wouldn't let that ball go by again.*

*The sneer is gone from Casey's lip, his teeth are clenched in hate;
he pounds with cruel violence his bat upon the plate.
And now the pitcher holds the ball, and now he lets it go,
and now the air is shattered by the force of Casey's blow.*

*Oh, somewhere in this favored land the sun is shining bright;
the band is playing somewhere, and somewhere hearts are light,
and somewhere men are laughing, and somewhere children shout;
but there is no joy in Mudville — mighty Casey has struck out.*

This humorous poem is famous to those of us who have grown up in America. We know the lilting verse and we know the famous line about Casey striking out, but I want to draw your attention to a couple of line in the poem that you may not have noticed. First, remember that there are four people who get up to bat

before Casey. No one expects them to get on base, and in fact the first two strike out immediately.

As a church, the worst thing we can do is to assume that even though we are on the same team, we will strike out too. We can come to church, we get into our uniforms, but we don't expect to participate in the game. Sure, we will sit in our pew, but we won't preach, or talk to visitors, or even teach a Bible study. After all, that's the Pastor's job, isn't it? The Pastor is supposed to be our Casey at bat, right?

There are people in this church right now who could be doing things greater than they can imagine for God. Yet so many see themselves as cheerleaders rather than players on the team. Some of you are like the Cooney and Burrows in the poem...

"...Cooney died at first, and Barrows did the same..."

That is, you never think of yourselves as the one who can get up to bat and win the game for the team. Some of you have a ministry. I see it; your pastor sees it, but you don't see it. So, instead you are content to just get up and allow yourself die at first base.

Others of us are like Flynn and Jimmy Blake. These two players in the poem got onto base.

"...Jimmy safe at second and Flynn a-hugging third."

Like Flynn and Blake, I get up into the pulpit and I make my swings. But the worst thing that someone like me can do is just be content with getting on base. I might get up here and say, "Well I don't need to do too much; we have an evangelist coming in later." I might be content to just put in my time and let the mighty Casey get up to bat.

I want to make it clear that I don't expect our Pastor or our evangelist to get up here and strike out. However, none of us should simply be content with simply sitting idle while our Casey does all the work. We are a team. If we want the Holy Ghost to fall today on this Day of Pentecost like it did on the first, then we need to

be like they were. They were all together in one accord and in one place. We are all here in one place, but we also need to be in one accord. We need to be one team.

An enemy is one who takes our weakness, our backhand, and uses it against us. A teammate is one who knows our weaknesses and uses his or her strength to compensate for our weakness. We need to pray that the Lord will show us our weaknesses and the weaknesses of our brothers and sisters. If the Lord shows you the weakness of your brother or sister, don't use that knowledge to undermine them; if you use your brother's weakness against them then that makes you their enemy. Instead, use your knowledge of their weakness to compensate for it with your strength. Be their brother or their sister; be their team mate.