

July 9, 2017 When It's 9-6 In The 9th Psalm 5

When I was a kid, summer holidays from school always involved baseball. I don't mean that I played in Little League. In fact I avoided organized sport with a vengeance...with the singular exception of CFL style, High School Football. There I was certain I understood the nature of the game, and my place within it. It was our school against 3 other schools in Port Arthur and 5 other schools in Fort William. But then, no high school Jr. (teen agers after all) thought of himself as a kid. No...I am referring to elementary school years, or what we would have simply called Public School. Summer meant baseball.

And by baseball I do not mean 9 to a side. Or hardball. We played softball. Usually it was 3 men up, a pitcher, 3 men manning the bases, and quite often 4 in the outfield. We played on the street, just as we played street hockey in the winter. My brother and I had a ball, which my father would repair from time to time by hand sewing the seams. We had 2 bats. Anything from a piece of board, to a piece of cardboard was a base. Homeruns happened because some of us could hit farther than we or anyone else in our neighbourhood could throw. And as my memory serves we never mastered the relay strategy to nail someone at home plate.

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As a result of all of this....I am surprised sometimes to realize how much of a Blue Jays fan I have become as an adult in his senior years. The first half of the season is almost over. The Blue Jays are in last place in their division. The playoffs are not beyond the realm of possibility. But more and more I am becoming satisfied if they occasionally win 2 out of 3 games against any team in baseball. And when it is 9-6 for the other guys in the 9th inning. I can be convinced to go to bed and read and find out how it ended in the morning. In fact I can say it better than that...when it is 9-6 for the other guys in the 9th it seems to me the other guys are most likely to win.

Hence the title of this message. Psalm 5 begins by addressing what appears to be a losing proposition. Life as a game with the score being 9-6 for the other guys. And it's the 9th inning, which really means time is running out. The possibility of getting one more run is very real. On a good night you might even get 2 which means you still lose. On a bad night you could get 4, bring in a reliever or even your closer and watch as they score 5 in the bottom of the inning....and so your team does really well. Except close only counts in horseshoes. If they get 5...you still lose, plain and simple.

Psalm 5 opens with those classic words of faith... "Give ear to my words O Lord, consider my sighing. Listen to my cry

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for help, my King and my God, for to you I pray. In the morning O Lord, you hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before you and wait in expectation.” To me it seems fairly clear the writer of the Psalm is in a mood. A cynical mood. You see, it’s 9-6 in the 9th. And it is not the home run king coming to bat for the good guys, it is the player with a 200 batting average, who has trouble with a 95 mile per hour fastball, and on most nights cannot hit a curve ball. In other words, the game is really over. But the nature of the game is you have to play as old Yogi said, “Till its over.”

“Give ear to my words O Lord, consider my sighing.” Most of us have played this part of the game, and I mean the game of life. We are believers right? We know what we should do. The old hymn reminds us we should “take it to the Lord in prayer.” And we do know how to pray. You call on God. The preacher encourages you to use your own words and let it all hang out. So we do...we plead with God to listen. Whether it is business gone south, the loss of work, the closing of a plant, a diagnosis we did not want to hear, or the loss of someone you love...it is the top of the 9th (late in the game), the score is 9-6 for the Yankees, and the fact is you need a miracle (and you are fairly certain those are in short supply). Or maybe it is just that

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you find it difficult to think Jesus is interested in baseball, your team, the way you feel.

The Psalm writer (who is David by the way) really gives away his state of mind when having opened his prayer with all the right words he goes on to say... “consider my sighing.” He is letting God the Lord in on a secret. The words were the easy part, he could find good words, maybe even the right words and say them. But his heart is another matter. He’s fairly convinced it is game over. He feels like even mighty Casey...is about to strike out. That they won’t even have to bat in the bottom of the inning. He feels (this is all about emotion) he feels he is lost. Like Eeyor in Winnie the Pooh. Or Joe Bftsplk! In Little Abner...they guy who always walked around under a grey cloud.

And yet, one of the reasons we Presbyterian Christians have a tendency to love the Psalms is they are always filled with hope in impossible circumstances. What a recovery David makes in verse 2. “Listen to my cry for help, my King and my God, for to you I pray.” David the King knows who is alone King and God in his life. The One who made the heavens and the earth. The One who made the waters part and delivered unworthy slaves to life and freedom. God gave them a song to sing, and a land they were certain that flowed with milk and

honey. After all, He is the God who does miracles. “To you God I pray.”

In Kevin Costner’s second great baseball film, *For Love Of The Game*, there comes the moment, late in the game when aging pitcher Billy Chapel notices the score board at Yankee Stadium. The Yanks (by the way Billy is pitching for Detroit) the board says the Yanks has no runs, no hits and no errors. It should be great news. He asks his catcher who has trotted out to the mound. “Gus has anyone been on base?” Gus says, “Nope. I aint never seen this before.” It hits Billy like a ton of bricks. He’s pitching a perfect game. No runs, no hits, no walks. It should be good news! Except he is close to the end of his career. His arm feels like it is made of lead. He can’t throw a curve without intense pain. And there are two more innings to play after this one. He’s almost certain he can’t make it. It would take a... miracle.

Verse 3 is like a cold shower that returns you to reality. “In the morning.” Remember when you were young. You felt you could do anything. Win every game. Accomplish the impossible, make the big play, defeat all comers. “In the morning, O Lord, I lay my requests before you, and wait in expectation.” Remember when you were young in the faith? You read the stories about Joshua and Moses, Daniel in the

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Lion's Den, Noah in the Ark. You prayed and you anticipated, you asked of God and you expected the earth to move, the heavens to open, the army of angels to deliver you.

One of the problems of getting older, of being of a certain age, is that you think you have really seen it all. You think you know how the world works. You may even have forgotten the cross was followed by the 3rd day, that the resurrection of Jesus was the energizing reality that propelled disciples forward, accomplishing more than that of which they were capable. I want you to remember God is real. Even when...no...especially when...it's 9-6 for them, not you, for them, in the top of the 9th. Things may look bleak. Maybe the only word that suits is..... Impossible. I want you to remember this, no matter what appears to be happening. The Lord our God is really good, an ace, a superstar....when it comes to things that are impossible. Remember that when it's 9-6 for them...in the top of the 9th. Let us pray.

Lord God who made us and loves us, who saves us;

Sometimes
we just do not have enough faith. Sometimes we cannot see the light of the sun for the shade under the big tree.

Sometimes we cannot remember the songs we sang in our youth because there have just been too many years gone by.

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Sometimes the storm clouds are all we can see. Lord help us to see when our eyes don't work. Help us to know you when we seem to know too much about the nature of life and the world. Help us to see in your word, the best of the best of books, that you surround us as with a shield. In Jesus name we pray. Amen