

Sermon

November 6, 2016 | All Saints | Luke 6:20-31 | Peter Lane

The Cubs won three in a row! Huh? Come on! Go Cubs Go.

What a great opportunity to talk about baseball and the communion of saints, how the saints in our own lives hand us along, and how those saints invite us to be thankfully present amidst laughing and weeping.

Last weekend, I had the great, good fortune of going to the World Series at Wrigley Field, scoring the game by hand with my wife and sons, cheering with my parents and siblings. Here is how I got there.

In 1929, my maternal grandfather, Dennis Carlson, then seven years old, the son of Swedish immigrants, moved from Minneapolis to Chicago, living only a mile from Cubs Park. To this day my grandpa always calls it Cubs Park, not Wrigley, the new name it had been given about the time he moved. He couldn't afford tickets as a kid—his dad drove a bread truck. But in those days the ushers would let the kids climb the fences or even let them in for free once the game started. The Cubs were good then, going to the World Series in 1929, 32, 35, and 38. My Grandpa still remembers the names of his favorite players: Catcher Gabby Hartnett and 1st Baseman Charlie Grimm. In September of 1945, Dennis was discharged from the Army Air Force just in time to listen to the Cubs in the World Series against the Detroit Tigers. They lost in seven. My Grandpa watched all of this year's World Series games, that is unless he fell asleep. He was thrilled when the Cubs won.

In 1936, my paternal grandfather Warren Lane, then 13 years old, moved to the Western Suburbs of Chicago and quickly became a Cubs fan. He lived most of his adult life outside Washington DC. When I was there in the summer he would always show me the Cubs' box score in the Washington Post and we would turn on WGN to watch. One treasured memory is going with my wife Erin and my grandpa and granny to Wrigley shortly after we got married in 1999. Grandpa Warren wore a goofy, short sleeve, button down Cubs shirt. Grandpa Warren died in 2008.

You might be wondering when I will get to saints. I have already been talking about the communion of saints. Dennis Carlson and Warren Lane and Gabby Hartnett and Charlie Grimm. No, I have not established their unique holiness or distinct moral virtue and certainly have not claimed for them any miracles. But these saints have handed me along, helped me know where I come from, who I am, and where I am going (Robert Coles, *Handing One Another Along*, xiii). They are saints.

Let me explain. To do so, let's contemplate Luke. "Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh." "Woe to you who are laughing now, for you will mourn and weep." I imagine you are used to hearing those as predictions, assurances that in the end justice will be served. You might be laughing now, Billy Bush, but weeping and mourning are coming. When you hear it as assurance of divine justice, you are hearing it through the filter of Deuteronomy. Moses comes down with the second set of tablets and instructs the people, "See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse" (Deut. 11:26). If you obey the commandments you will get a blessing. If you do not obey, you will get a curse. Everyone gets what they deserve. Fair and square. If this was the moral universe we lived in, then really impressive moral exemplars, capital 'S' saints would be utterly essential, leading us through a thicket to find God's elusive reward.

I understand the world differently. When I hear Luke say, "Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh" and "Woe to you who are laughing now, for you will mourn and weep," I hear it through the filter of Ecclesiastes. The sage of Ecclesiastes says there is "a time to weep, and a time to laugh." Things are not fair and square. As one commentator put it, "Just desserts for both hero and scoundrels pale in comparison with the common fate of all the living" (Brown, *Ecclesiastes*, 47). A life lived with laughter and weeping—that is our common fate. The world is not fair. The sun shines and the rain falls on us all. When you weep, know that laughter is on the horizon. When you laugh, do not forget that mourning

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and weeping might come quickly. If this is the way the world is, we need saints who make us awake to the present, who hand us along in the midst of an unfair world, who incite us to give thanks.

After the Cubs won game seven, manager Joe Maddon could be seen wearing an old, grungy California Angels baseball cap. It was his late father's hat. During the 10th inning it was stuffed in Maddon's pocket. Asked afterwards, he said, "My dad was here tonight." Maddon was remembering his beloved dead. Laughing and weeping held together. Last weekend, at Wrigley, my dad wore his dad's old Cubs shirt, that same goofy, short sleeve, button down one. Looking at that old shirt, I wanted my Grandfather to be at Wrigley with us too. In the midst of the joy of cheering for the Cubs, there was sadness. Maddon wearing his father's cap. My dad wearing his father's shirt. Part of our lives is the pain and sorrow of losing those we love. And yet those same ones we loved and who loved us bring us joy and make us who we are. They are our saints.

CS Lewis married later in life. He writes of the laughter of his marriage, "For those few years H. and I feasted on love, every mode of it—solemn and merry, romantic and realistic, sometimes as dramatic as a thunderstorm, sometimes as comfortable and unemphatic as putting on your soft slippers. No cranny of heart or body remained unsatisfied." Wow! She died just a few years after they were married. In his great reflection on his grief at her death, *A Grief Observed*, Lewis does not focus on God as the one who reverses fortune, he does not take solace that his wife Joy had been obedient to the commandments and thus would now enjoy light and laughter. He is pushed into the present by his grief, "One never meets just Cancer, or War, or Unhappiness (or Happiness). One only meets each hour or moment that comes. All manner of ups and downs. Many bad spots in our best times, many good ones in our worst." As the sage of Ecclesiastes says, there is "a time to weep, and a time to laugh." "Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh."

"Woe to you who are laughing now, for you will mourn and weep." This is the human condition. We are invited to be present in the midst of it. And today we get to remember our beloved dead, those who handed us along, and gave us a way of standing tall in the sun and the rain.

I am proud to be the grandson of both Dennis and Warren. They are both upstanding individuals who have put the care of their families, their churches, and the poor at the forefront. They are not, of course, perfect. When young Dennis was cheering for those great pennant winning Cubs teams of the 30s, he was not cheering for any African-Americans. Those Cubs wouldn't have it. I don't think Warren made it back from the Pacific in time to listen to the 1945 World Series. He was an officer on a landing ship tank and lived the rest of his life understanding a bit of his complicity in the hell that is war. They did not merely overcome those experiences. "Old knots stay where limbs [are] torn away" (Yvor Winters in her poem *The Old Weep Gently*). And yet, they handed me along in so many ways, because they both gave thanks each day amidst laughing and weeping, tried to be present. They loved me. They are saints for me. In the prayers, we will invite you to say the names of those who handed you along, your beloved dead. Please don't be shy. Just call out their names.

Before I sit down, one parting thought. In 1907, the Cubs won the World Series, beating the Tigers 4 games to none. Do you know what happened the next year, in 1908? They won the World Series again. Why not double up again? "Wait 'till next year!"