

Rewriting our Future- Tracy Sprowls

There was once a little boy practicing ball in the back yard. He'd announce, "I'm the greatest hitter in the world" and then he would toss the ball into the air, swing at the ball and miss. He did this three times, each time announcing to the dog in the yard, "I am the greatest hitter in the world." After he struck out, he stopped and examined his ball and then his bat. He adjusted his cap and then exclaimed, "Wow! I am the greatest pitcher in the world."

The science fiction writer Kim Stanley Robinson wrote in his essay for the New Yorker in May that "the virus is rewriting our imaginations. What felt impossible has become thinkable." We face a pivotal moment in the life of this nation, if we can rewrite our imaginations, we can rewrite our future.

This time of the novel corona virus, this time of self-isolation and social distancing has brought with it challenges, loss, and grief. While the coronavirus has held our focus as a people and as a nation, we know, too, that democracy is struggling, people in the margins are struggling, and the economy is struggling. And within this time of chaos and disarray and upheaval, as the protests around the world attest to, the increasing awareness by the public of that other well-known and longtime pandemic of white supremacy. The world is spinning, it seems, into a future unpredictable, scary, and unknown. The temptation is to cling to the past and to the things we know and have found security and stability in. But this moment is pregnant with new possibility. We can build a future different than the one we are currently destined for if we are willing to rewrite our imaginations; if we are willing to see in a new way.

In the widest sense, rewriting our imaginations is spiritual work. It is spiritual work because it has us stopping in the midst of whatever is going on around us to pause and to take a new look. From that moment of pause can come a new way of seeing, a new way of being, and ultimately a whole new direction.

The Everyday Spiritual Practices program I lead each Friday is about ways of finding that pause. We take a look at the things we do every day like walking through a doorway or picking up our phones and practicing how to pause. The idea is that the pause, taking time for even a few minutes of awareness, can awaken a deeper connection to life, to love, to gratitude. And out of this pause and reflection we can make new choices, more grounded decisions. We can begin to rewrite our imaginations.

In our own lives, we can find moments of pause. As a nation, as a world we have been forced into a pause. The whole world paused by pandemic. And in this big pause, pauses in graduation and proms, vacations and promotions, sporting events and conferences. A pause in the usual 4th of July celebrations this weekend. In this pause on this holiday weekend, I've been thinking about the return of baseball after it's very long pause.

I come from Baseball and Patriotism. What I mean by this is that I was raised on loving America and loving baseball. My dad grew up in West Virginia. As he saw it, he had two choices, the military or the coal mines. He was appointed to the Naval Academy in 1960

and had two tours in Vietnam and then came back stateside where he served for over twenty years in active duty. The last seven years of his career were as a diplomat in Saudi Arabia and then Egypt. My parents, dad married his high-school sweetheart, raised their three children to be patriotic- to respect the military, love this country and be loyal to it, and to always, always honor the flag. We were taught to love this country even though it wasn't perfect. This country gave dad opportunity and in return he gave his loyalty and we were expected to give ours.

How did my family become Pirates fans? For my dad, he grew up in team territory so naturally he was a fan. But for my mom, well, she has a family connection, her cousin played for the Pirates back in the late 50's and early 60's. The depth of Pirates loyalty in my family can be measured in feet, 406 feet to be exact. Yankees fans will cringe with recollection the homerun hit by mom's cousin, Bill Mazerowski, in the seventh game of the 1960 World Series, breaking the 9-9 tie and crowning the Pirates world champions.

Baseball and Patriotism have a long history of being entangled. Baseball and the American flag go way back and adorning the stadiums with red, white and blue bunting even further. The Star-Spangled Banner was sung at ballgames even before it was the anthem of the United States. Yet, the patriotism we have witnessed in baseball has intensified since September 11, 2001. Huge flags highlight opening day and other special games, and not just one flag but dozens fly over the stadium in the wind and on the monitors and smaller versions embellish player's uniforms. The song God Bless America has been added to the song line-up and the military and police, worthy of recognition, certainly, in the days after 9/11 are highlighted at Sunday games. Still. Nineteen years later.

And yet, patriotism is defined differently for different people. For some it is honor of country, honor the flag, respect history and the status quo. For others, patriotism is recognizing that this country has not yet lived up to her ideals and that the struggle, the protests and the speaking out are about urging Americans and our government to lean into the ideals and possibilities of democracy, that the best of America is still ahead. This is why the patriotism of baseball is so problematic. In my mind, it maintains the divide.

As baseball comes back at the end of this month, it can begin however it wants to, all possibilities are in play because the future remains to be written. I think it's time for baseball to disentangle itself from patriotism. What that might look like is for them to decide. But maybe as baseball comes back, it might be a start to highlight what baseball has always taught us- patience, non-violence, philosophy (and yes, even religion), strategy, and hope, yes, hope. Baseball gives us hope because as every fan knows, as in baseball, as in life, *it ain't over 'til its over*.

In some very real ways, we are each the young child with a ball in one hand and a bat in the other and the opportunity to stop- to pause and to reassess. Each of us needs to look at our own lives and figure out what we need to reimagine for ourselves. What are we good at? What do we need to let go of? How do we need to see in a new way? I ask you

not to see only what you cannot do or be limited by the idea that something can't be done. The future really is in our hands.

The future is uncertain, and yet, we can only build a new future different than the one we are currently destined for if we are willing to *rewrite our imaginations*, if we are willing to see in a new way.

Let us begin it this day. Amen.