

If there's no crying in baseball, well then I would also say that there's just plain old no forgiveness in sports, period. I was talking to someone this week about sports grudges, how deep they can run, how long they can be held for, and at one point he was like...I should probably let this go, and me being me, sports nut that I am, my pastoral instinct *did not* kick in, there was no mild mannered, well ya know maybe some of these things you can move beyond. I basically blurted out, as much as you can blurt out in a text message, you don't have to let this stuff go!! No!! Sports grudges are for life!! Because the thing is, if I encouraged him to let his sports grudges go, well then I was probably going to have to examine some of my own, and that's just non-negotiable in my world.

You are not going to make me let go of my complete and total, I mean I'll admit it, hate for the Colorado Avalanche. I don't care that they and the Red Wings were bitter rivals over 20 years ago. I don't care that Claude Lemieux the dirtiest player I've ever seen when he slammed Kris Draper's face so hard into the boards he was in the hospital for a week, is now retired and everyone involved has seemed to move on. No, no, the last few weeks as the Avs have been playing the Dallas Stars in the playoffs, I have been the world's most adamant Stars fan imaginable because the Avs need to *not win* in my world.

The only other grudge that comes even remotely close to that level, the kind that can get me riled up just by thinking about it actually has nothing to do with a team, a player, a rivalry, none of the usual suspects, but rather...with an umpire. You say *Jim Joyce* to any Tigers fan and you will get a *response*, let me tell you. Middle of the baseball season 2010, I was sitting on my mom's couch, she is completely and totally asleep in the recliner on the other side of the room, and I woke her out of a dead sleep by, I am mildly ashamed to admit, throwing a magazine across the room and yelling unbelievably loudly. Why? Because one of our young pitchers, who was finally starting to find his groove, was working on a *perfect game*. No hits, no walks, sheer perfection. It was the kind of game that could define a career...and it did, but not in the direction you wanted. The *final out* of the game, it's a tricky grounder to first, so our pitcher runs over to cover the base, and don't get me wrong, it's a close call, but *not that close*, and the first base ump...called the guy safe. And there it went. Perfect game gone. And there was no replay at that point, so it just had to stand. The dude was clearly out and yet there he stood on first, and the box score ticked the zero hits over to one. It was the most abhorrent call I'd ever seen in my life. And God bless Armando Galarraga, he didn't argue, he didn't fight, he just got the next guy out and walked off the field. Eventually, the two of them

actually went on to write a book together about sportsmanship and forgiveness actually, but y'all, I can't do it. That kid's career plummeted after that game. He was never the same. And so here I sit, a decade later and I remember that moment like it was yesterday.

Grudges linger...they embed themselves deep within our hearts, our souls, our very being and even if we can't remember all the ins and outs vividly all the time, we cling to the emotions of them like they're our lifesaver in the middle of the ocean. Sometimes they are ridiculously irrational, see my above examples, but other times, we have all the logical reasons in the world to hold on to them, to let them simmer on the back burner of our minds, reminding us every time they bubble up that we have a *reason* for them, to still be hurt, to still be angry, to withhold forgiveness because while we might be powerless in the rest of the situation, we at least have *that*. We wield forgiveness like it's the only weapon left in arsenal, rather than treating it like a precious gift to be cultivated, shared, appreciated, *felt*.

Y'all know this, but it bears repeating...I love Peter. And he is on full display here. Jesus has just given them instructions for how to deal with conflict amongst community members, and Peter wants to show *just how much* he has gotten the lesson. I imagine him kind of strutting up to Jesus,

thinking, man, I am going to *blow his mind*, he is going to be so proud of me. Hey Jesus, how many times should I forgive someone? *Seven times?* Peter thinks he is being *beyond* generous. Seven times is a *ton*, and it's the perfect number in Hebrew culture, so he thinks he just has got this down, and then there's Jesus. No, no, Peter...not seven, seventy-seven. And that doesn't mean time seventy eight is grudge making time either, it means, you never stop forgiving, there is no limit to it, there is no end point, it goes on into infinity, no matter how big or small the injury may be.

Jesus then ups the ante of his explanation by laying out the world's most unthinkable parable. The amount of money that this king forgives is unfathomable. This is like an impossible, not payoffable amount of debt. This is like five kids going to Ivy League schools with no scholarships and 6.5% interest on their loans kind of debt. It's so much money it's incomprehensible, and he just...lets it go. Which is illogical and irrational and just plain not done. In comparison, the debt that doesn't get forgiven is miniscule. It's like your friend placed an Amazon order for you at Christmas and you have to pay them back a couple of times. It's manageable. It's not even that big of a deal. And yet, this guy who has just had a ridiculous amount of debt forgiven can't bring himself to return the favor. He holds his grudge tight to his chest and demands what he's owed

and takes zero consideration of the fact that he was just forgiven beyond anything he ever deserved. There is no one to one correlation in his head, I was just forgiven so maybe I should forgive. All he can see is what he's owed, what he thinks he deserves, that's all that matters to him, until the consequences for his actions come into play and then he tries to backpedal but by then it's too late.

Jesus is trying to get Peter to recognize something that's about to happen in their lives and how it's going to need to play out in their daily lives from that point on. In the not too distant future, Jesus is going to give up his life in order that every single sin, every single person has ever committed may be forgiven. Jesus is about to forgive the most unfathomable amount of debt that could ever possibly be thought of, and that kind of forgiveness is going to become not only Peter's, but all of our benchmark for what forgiveness not only should feel like, but should look like in our own lives.

Each and every Sunday, we are called to lay ourselves bare at the foot of the cross, confessing those things which weigh on our hearts, the things that we have done, big, small, inbetween, allegedly good, bad, or indifferent, the things that we have failed to do, the words not spoken, the action not taken. All of those things which separate us from God and one another, we

are called to own and admit before God, *trusting* that the only thing we are going to hear in return is forgiveness, complete and utter forgiveness. We lay our burdens down and receive a clean slate in return. Each and every day God forgives the inconceivable, and each and every day, we act like forgiveness is something we can barely muster up the effort for.

It begs the question, how would we feel if God forgave us the way we forgive others? If God sometimes did the rote, yeah, yeah, I forgive you, but in six months this is going to come back up and rear its ugly head because I am actually not over it and want to use it as ammunition in our next argument thing. If God sometimes did the, I will forgive you, but just not yet thing. If God sometimes did the, I forgive you, but I'm going to treat you like garbage for the foreseeable future so you still feel guilty thing. And honestly, maybe that's how we think God does operate, because to take in the enormity of God's forgiveness towards us is hard, it feels like it's impossible, that there's no way that God could love us to that level that God would forgive us all our deepest, darkest, most grievous sins. And yet...that's what we trust, that's what we place our hope in. We trust that when we confess our sins, God is going to respond with forgiveness, no matter what...but we can't seem to muster up the same kind of grace for our loved ones, our friends, our family, ourselves...

God has made the world wide enough for grace...and that is an immensely hard thing to take in, because frankly for as much as we want God to forgive us and be graceful with us, we don't want God to do the same thing to those whom we'd rather hold a grudge against and horde our forgiveness from. We want God to operate in Godlike ways with us, and human ways with everyone else, particularly those who have hurt us. Yet, God remains God and the message remains the same. We have been immeasurably forgiven, beyond our wildest dreams and that level of grace is freeing and amazing and just...incredible. And if God can forgive us that much, erase our biggest debts, then it's highly possible we need to at least try to extend the tiniest inch, the smallest scrap of forgiveness to those around us. I'm not saying it's easy. I'm not saying I even think I'm super capable of it all the time, because I know I'm not...and yet...we pray, forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.

Do we want God to forgive us as we forgive others? Or do we want to dare our hearts to widen themselves for grace to sneak in so that we might start forgiving others as God has forgiven us. Look, I don't want to forgive Jim Joyce. I want to hold onto that grudge with all I've got because sometimes it just feels good, but at the end of the day...grace abounds, and grace calls us to try. And so we try. We dare to try to forgive. **AMEN!!!**