

Microscope or Telescope?

There is a story of a young boy, we'll call him Henry. Henry was in the backyard, with his baseball and bat. In his best sports announcer voice, Henry called out "get ready folks, Henry, the greatest batter in the world is at the plate!" Then Henry threw the ball in the air, swung, and missed. "What a surprise!" announcer Henry proclaimed, "who would have thought that the world's greatest batter would miss!" Again Henry threw the ball in the air, swung and missed, and again announcer Henry broadcast the shock of two strikes against the "greatest" with an encouragement to the nonexistent crowd to be ready for this next pitch. Again Henry threw the ball, swung and missed, and again announcer Henry recounted the action. "What a moment, what a showdown, the world's greatest batter faces off against the world's greatest pitcher and strikes out!" Let's give three cheers for the Henry, the world's greatest pitcher – possibility the greatest pitcher of all times!"

What an example of acknowledging and adapting to the ever changing aspects of life. Imagine how differently young Henry's day would have been had the reality of seeing himself and his performance not shifted from batter to pitcher. What an example it is to us to embrace that what we call "reality" may not be set in concrete, what a call this story is for us to acknowledge that our perceptions, experiences, beliefs and focus shape the very thing we name as reality.

By our nature, human nature, we are often reacting. Reacting to what we hear, feel and sense -- reacting out of a desire, a will, for self-preservation, a desire for control and a desire for fulfillment and purpose. Much like the quick succession of balls flying at a baseball player, life can come flying at us, ever changing, trying to throw us off kilter, granting little time to consider, to adapt, to ponder. Reality can become narrowed to what's coming at us in the moment, and our vision of self and world can become defined by what we just missed.

Thanks be to God, our perception and reality are not one and the same. Thanks be to God, we do not have to limit our reactions or responses to only the reality we understand or can explain. In the handbook those of us are using for the "Grand Sweep" year long reading of the Bible, J Ellsworth Kalas writes "God's dreams for us are quite beyond anything we have ever imagined. Indeed, they are of such dimensions that we are hardly equipped to grasp them."

Hardly equipped to grasp – I suspect than may well describe Noah as God called him out of his ordinary life to build an ark. Imagine what a fight with "reality" Noah must have had to undergo in order to trust in his ability to hear God and then to move into the future reality God named. I wonder if he nodded in agreement as God named that "flesh", that is humankind, had filled the earth with violence. I wonder if Noah was so overwhelmed hearing "his part" of God's plans that he had little thought to God's part. I wonder what would be my reaction, your reaction, our reaction, if we heard God call us to something so foolish when there is so much need and sin in this world. What would we do if God called us to stop building our lives and instead to give all our

efforts, resources and energies to something that only God could begin to perceive, to understand or to desire?

Most of us, at a fairly early age, have some sense if we are batters or pitchers, of what our place in this world, or at least our world, is. We're into classifying; rich, poor, middle-class; smart, pretty, athletic, winner, loser, trendsetter or nerd. How might our reality change if we, as completely as Henry, could rid our selves of these limits we place upon ourselves, and more importantly on others? Most of us find and work hard to maintain a balance of compassion and selfishness; of giving and keeping, of hoping and believing.

Yet, when we look at the life and teaching of Jesus, the life in which Christianity believes God is most fully revealed, we see that everything, every classification, every expectation, every grasp of reality, is turned upside down. The way that Jesus lived made no sense. The teachings of Jesus did not promote self or even social protection. The death of Jesus was not the end; it was a dramatic new beginning. Throughout all four Gospels, just about the time the disciples seemed to just about have it figured out, have life with Jesus figured out, he shifts focus, or adds a new dimension, or takes an unexpected turn. Not that he contradicts; he just never settles in, reality never comes fully into a focus the disciples can grasp – never settles into a predictable pattern of pitches.

And so is reality for disciples of today. Like Noah what God asks is beyond us. Where we would focus on our lives, God is calling us to prepare to care for creation and created, as wide reaching as Noah's call to the preservation all of the animal kingdom. Where we would like to abide with Jesus on the mountain top, where all were well fed and plenty was left over, God calls us to darkest valleys of doubt, fear and want, to shine and share the light of God. That is why and where the power of Paul's words in today's second reading become and shape our reality.

We have been raised with Christ, we know that we and reality are much more than our temporary, earthly existence, and we have been given, we are continuous given, the choice, of where we will sit our minds. We also know that fulfillment, contentment, purpose ... God .. is found in when we give ourselves away, and that perhaps the harder the struggle to give, the greater the glory to God.

Let me close with a final baseball story. I will be reading this one, as it is in a father's words, and we know there is great power in a father's words. Listen for the reality shift – and wonder how the shift may have reshaped the future of those involved:

In Brooklyn, New York, Chush is a school that caters to learning disabled children. At a Chush fund-raising dinner, the father of a Chush child shared the following story about his son Shay:

One afternoon, Shay and his father walked past a park where some boys Shay knew were playing baseball. Shay asked, "Do you think they will let me play?" Shay's father knew that his son was not at all athletic and that most boys would not want him on their team. But Shay's father understood that if his son was chosen to play it would give him a comfortable sense of belonging. Shay's father approached one of the boys in the field and asked if Shay could play.

The boy looked around for guidance from his team-mates. Getting none, he took matters into his own hands and said "We are losing by six runs and the game is in the eighth inning. I guess he can be on our team and we'll try to put him up to bat in the ninth inning." Shay's father was ecstatic as Shay smiled broadly. Shay was told to put on a glove and go out to play short center field. In the bottom of the eighth inning, Shay's team scored a few runs but was still behind by three in the bottom of the ninth inning.

Shay's team scored again and now with two outs and the bases loaded with the potential winning run on base, Shay was scheduled to be up. Would the team actually let Shay bat at this juncture and give away their chance to win the game? Surprisingly, Shay was given the bat. Everyone knew that it was all but impossible because Shay didn't even know how to hold the bat properly, let alone hit with it.

However as Shay stepped up to the plate, the pitcher moved a few steps to lob the ball in softly so Shay should at least be able to make contact. The first pitch came and Shay swung clumsily and missed. One of Shay's teammates came up to Shay and together they held the bat and faced the pitcher waiting for the next pitch. The pitcher again took a few steps forward to toss the ball softly toward Shay. As the pitch came in, Shay and his teammate swung at the ball and together they hit a slow ground ball to the pitcher.

The pitcher picked up the soft grounder and could easily have thrown the ball to the first baseman. Shay would have been out and that would have ended the game.

Instead, the pitcher took the ball and threw it on a high arc to right field, far beyond the reach of the first baseman. Everyone started yelling, "Shay, run to first, run to first." Never in his life had Shay run to first. He scampered down the baseline, wide-eyed and startled. By the time he reached first base, the right fielder had the ball.

He could have thrown the ball to the second baseman to tag out Shay, who was still running. But the right fielder understood what the pitcher's intentions were, so he threw the ball high and far over the third baseman's head. Everyone yelled, "run to second, run to second" Shay ran towards second base as the runners ahead of him deliriously circled to the bases towards home. As Shay reached second base, the opposing short stop ran to him, turned him in the direction of third base, and shouted "Run to third".

As Shay rounded third, the boys from both teams ran behind him screaming "Shay run home." Shay ran home, stepped on home plate and all 18 boys lifted him on their shoulders and made him the hero, as he had just hit a "grand slam" and won the game for his team. On that day all the players found a new definition of being on the winning team.