

# FAITHMATTERS

REFLECTIONS ON LIFE & FAITH ~ BY JIM HARNISH

October 23, 2008

Dear Hyde Park Disciples:

## **The Inner Struggle of Baseball**

Poor Matt Horan. With the World Series coming to Tampa Bay, our Associate Pastor made the evening news the other day. Don't miss the internal struggle of his baseball loyalties here. You can read Matt's story for yourself here.

Matt is torn by the inner conflict of his early childhood conditioning as a Philadelphia Phillies fan and his more mature identity as a citizen of Tampa. I think I hear St. Paul saying, "When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways." (I Corinthians 13:11) Come on, Matt! Even folks who have never put on a glove or made it to the "seventh inning stretch" are putting on their Rays caps!

## **To Will One Thing**

But it's not just about baseball. Folks who are a lot more interested in baseball than I have used baseball as a metaphor for life, none better than baseball commissioner Bart Giamatti saying that "baseball is about going home and how hard it is to get there and how driven is our need." More on the book here. So, let me push the metaphor a step further and use a much-abused and often-misunderstood biblical word. The baseball conflict in Matt's soul is a metaphor for holiness.

Soren Kierkegaard, the great Danish Christian philosopher, gave the struggle its classic expression when he said, "Purity of heart is to will one thing." His book by that title is available at Cokesbury.com here. Holiness, as I understand it, has to do with determining the "one thing" that will demand the central loyalty of our hearts and shape the way we live. It's about shifting our commitment away from the many gods of the world around us into one consuming loyalty to the God who first told the

Hebrew people, “You shall be holy as I the Lord your God am holy.”  
(Leviticus 20:26)

In the Bible, holiness is not some kind of esoteric mysticism or spooky spirituality. Holiness is practical. The book of Leviticus is downright tedious in the way it describes the life of holiness in the intricate details of our relationships, finances, politics and even the details of bodily cleanliness. We don't need to get hung up in the details of Levitical legalism to get the point. The holy life is a life in which every single thing is oriented around our relationship with a holy God, so that our lives become the tangible expression of God's life in this world.

### **Wholly Holy**

Here's the truth. It's no easier to live a holy life than it is for Matt to decide whether to cheer for the Rays or the Phillies. Every faithful disciple has experienced the kind of inner conflict Paul describes in Romans 7. It isn't easy, but it is very good. Once we settle who will be god in our lives, we discover the freedom and joy that comes in living into a life of holiness.

Okay. I'm using Matt and the World Series as a shill to draw you into the worship series that begins this Sunday. Take a look here. We'll explore the practical implications of a life of holiness and discover the resources that can help us along the way. Please join us in the daily scripture readings and be with us for this exciting and challenging journey.

And, by the way, “Go, Rays!”

### **ReCONNECT Through Commitment**

The responses are coming in as everyone in our church family is invited to make their commitments of prayers, presence, gifts and service for the year ahead. If you have not made your commitment, please bring your card to worship this Sunday or mail it to the church office. This church needs every one of us to share in its ministry!

Grace and peace,



The Rev. Dr. James A. Harnish  
Hyde Park United Methodist Church  
500 W. Platt St.

Tampa, FL 33606  
(813) 253-5388