

“Hope Prevails (Thanks, Bobby)”
Sermon for First Christian Church of Decatur, GA
Season of Pentecost, Sunday, July 27, 2014
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Holy Scriptures: Romans 8: 12-25

So then, brothers and sisters, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh -- for if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear; you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, “Abba! Father!” it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ--if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him. I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us.

For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

Thanks, Bobby.

On Sunday, October 3, 2010,
immediately after the San Francisco Giants defeated
the San Diego Padres,
the Atlanta Braves burst into a joyous
celebration at Turner Field
because their own victory over the
Philadelphia Phillies
coupled with a Padres loss
sealed a Wild Card place in
the postseason.

As Atlanta fans in the stands chanted, “Pick up Bobby! Pick
up Bobby!”
several players hoisted manager Bobby Cox onto their
shoulders,
and a grateful city cheered.

In my first 54 years of life on earth
I have been both cursed and blessed to watch Bobby
Cox manage the Braves
to National League division titles, pennants,
and a World Series win.

I say cursed because I was a die-hard Mets fan throughout
my formative years,
and every Braves’ division title was at the expense of
the Amazin’ Mets.

I say blessed because after moving to Atlanta in ‘98,
and closely observing how Bobby Cox led my adopted
hometown nine,
I slowly shifted allegiance and began to pull for

guys

nicknamed Chipper, Big Cat, Bulldog,
and the Jay-Hey Kid
(aka, Jones, Galarraga, Maddox, and
Heyward, respectively).

Just as we may adopt a new team to cheer for or a new soul
to raise,

we are spiritually adopted by God.

Adoption is a wonderful, theological theme in the Holy Bible.
*“For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into
fear;*

you have received a spirit of adoption.

*When we cry, “Abba! Father!” it is that very Spirit
bearing witness with our spirit that we are children
of God,*

*and if children, then heirs,
heirs of God and joint heirs with
Christ...”*

The Apostle Paul teaches us that any distance that ever
existed

between humanity and Creator, between us and the
Holy, has been overcome

because in Christ we are adopted by God and
claimed as God’s children.

Because we are God’s own,

we will be blessed to become God’s heirs.

Early Christians would know that a Roman Emperor could
and sometimes did

select and choose a young adult that he had grown to
respect,

and would adopt him and name him as the sole
heir to the throne,

a choice made over and against his own

children and bloodline.
So, as heirs, as people of hope and faith,
as chosen children of God who celebrate the joy and
Good News of Jesus Christ,
how should we live?

Here are seven life lessons we have gleaned by observing
Hall of Fame Braves Manager Bobby Cox
at work and play in the ball fields of the Lord:

1. Prepare by doing your homework.

When the umpire yells, “Play ball!,” Bobby Cox was relaxed and raring to go.

He was ready because he’d already done his homework,
studying other teams tendencies, strengths and
weaknesses.

He prepared his players for whatever may come.

He told his pitchers, batters, and coaches beforehand what to anticipate.

During the game you could see him refer to his pad of notes. By taking care of what is his responsibility and letting others do theirs,

he put his team in position to win.

Quarterback Peyton Manning said,

“Pressure is what you feel when you don’t know what you are doing.”

Do your homework, be prepared,

and let pressure become something in your rearview mirror.

2. Take the 162-game season one series at a time.

We have cultural yearning to look too far ahead.

Bobby Cox focused on the task at hand.

He encouraged his players to tackle one pitch, one at bat, one game, one series at a time
rather than get caught up in what is way down the road,
and usually far beyond our reach or ability to effect.

Focus on what is before you today and give it your all,
then trust that the long run will be taken care of as well.

The Spirit of the Lord led Jesus,
still dripping wet from the River Jordan,
out into the dessert wasteland to face his shadow places,
the masked areas in need of illumination,
the temptations of selfishness
and greed and self-righteousness.

Our faith affirms that just as the Spirit of the Lord was with Jesus,
this same Spirit calls us to reflection, discernment,
and to be engaged in the here and now.

Jesus was led by the Spirit out of the dessert and then back into the community of faith.

Today the Spirit of the Lord is calling us to be connected to the holy, one day at a time.

Barbara Brown Taylor wrote in *An Altar in the World: A Geography of Faith*:

*“No one longs for what he or she already has,
and the accumulated insight of those wise about the spiritual life
suggests that the reason so many of us
cannot see the red X that marks the spot is because*

we are standing on it.

All we lack is the willingness to imagine that we already have everything we need.

The only thing missing is our consent to be where we are.”

Be where you are, enjoying every day, one day at a time.

3. Encouragement works.

“Take your pitch, Chipper!”

“Go get ‘em, Billy!”

Braves batters at the plate and pitchers on the mound regularly heard their coach offer cheerful, pithy words of encouragement.

Whether his guy is hitting .340 or .225, regardless of the score or the inning,

Bobby Cox rooted his guys on and willed for them to do well.

His cheerleading is unconditional.

Don’t think for one second his players didn’t appreciate or cherish his undivided attention simply because they were adults.

They heard his words and treasured them.

Cheerleading is contagious.

Watch the next time a Brave sacrifices himself in order to move a runner over,

and see how he gets a pat on the back from 100% of his teammates on the bench.

Braves don’t have to hit grand slams to be praised (although they are welcome);

every positive effort is recognized and respected.

4. Hustle.

If you want to be an Atlanta Brave, expect to run out weak

ground balls.

Players who jog to first base or saunter after a fly ball
wake up the next morning to discover they are on
another team.

The word on the street is that in the Braves' minor league
system,

should a player not hustle and give life 100%,
then a fellow player or a coach will pull him
aside

and say, "*What you just did, Bobby
doesn't like that. Hustle.*"

5. Practice loyalty, even when it's not popular.

If there is anything Bobby Cox did that drove me crazy it was
his loyalty.

Slumping batters, streaky pitchers, bumbling fielders
got so many chances to fight and claw their way out of
their doldrums

that I have been known to direct harsh
thoughts in his general direction.

And yet, it was his loyalty that won titles, saved countless
careers,

and earned him his players' undying devotion.

Mine, as well.

Be like Bobby.

Stand by those who go through slumps, who get stuck, who
make a series of mistakes.

God is loyal; God is faithful; God is ever-present;
we can be so, as well.

Who do you know who needs to know that you have her
back?

Who do you know that needs to hear that you are supporting
him?

Who do you know who needs you to move past what is popular and just be present?

6. Surround yourself with good people.

We are not surprised that so many of Bobby Cox's former players and assistant coaches
have gone on to become managers,
or have gone on to lead successful, meaningful
lives after baseball.

He puts himself in position to succeed
by intentionally working alongside people of good
moral character
and with complementary skills.

The benefits are manifold.

For example, whenever there was a concern to be addressed
in the clubhouse,

Bobby Cox trusted his veteran players and coaches to
take care of it.

A healthy clubhouse can make a world of difference.

A healthy community can make a world of difference.

At the core of building and sustaining healthy communities
are healthy relationships.

Life in the Spirit is more than an identity; it is a relationship.

Life in the Spirit is a relationship we have with God
that comes to us as a gift from God.

What connects us with God, and with each other?

Ministry is about relationships.

Fellowship is grounded in relationships.

Healthy work and family and community environment are
due to healthy relationships.

Relationships are deeper and more long-lasting than any
contract

We are connected with God through a relationship of

unconditional love.

Unconditional love is resilient, honest, forthright,
sacrificial, hopeful, encouraging,
forgiving, moving ever forward,
transformative, and cosmic.

7. Every day is a chance at a fresh start.

Bobby Cox treats every game as a new beginning.
The player who wore a golden sombrero (four strikeouts in a
game) the night before
gets to start the next day,
and he knows that his manager
will have high hopes and no regrets.

Paul said, “*Do not let the sun go down on your anger.*”
Deal with whatever is bothering you before the sun goes
down,
and the next day is a fresh start,
one without yesterday’s dirty laundry all over
the place.

Paul also said, “*We are hopeful, for that which we do not
see.*”
We are heirs, adopted, chosen, children of God.
As hopeful children of God, heirs of Christ, we have this joy.
The Lord puts a new and right spirit within us.
Each day is a new beginning, a fresh start.

You may have additional lessons that you have learned
by watching a master craftsman at work.

I would love to hear them.

Meanwhile, my friends, join me in applying
what Bobby Cox and the Apostle Paul modeled day in
and day out.

Covenant with God and one another to be prepared.

Offer one another words of encouragement.

Let the past be over and the present be a gift.

Support and love one another, especially when in a slump,
for that is when we need love the most.

Hustle. Put forth the good energy that is expected and life
requires.

Hope prevails. Be hopeful, for that which we do not see.

Increase your opportunities for growth and goodness and
grace

by surrounding yourself with people
who demonstrate solid, moral character;
and one day you, too,
will be chosen for the ultimate
Hall of Fame.

*All power be to the Creator, the Son, and the Holy
Spirit. Amen!*